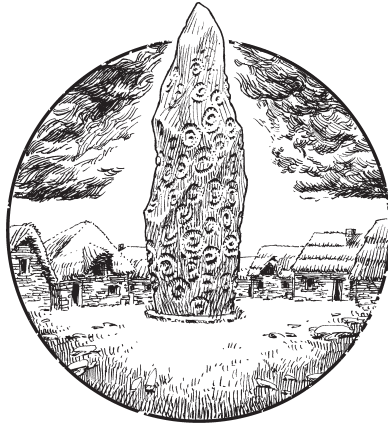


I



Stonetop

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POWERED BY THE
APOCALYPSE

Kickstarter Backer Playkit

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Dear backers,

Thanks for bringing *Stonetop* to life! We hope that you'll enjoy this preview of the final product.

A few things you should know going in:

- ⦿ These documents are close to their final form, but still part of a work-in-progress, and incomplete. That being said, everything you need to run the game is here.
- ⦿ If you spot typos or areas where the language is unclear, we invite you to comment on the PDFs.
- ⦿ If you have questions or comments about the gameplay or mechanics, please share your thoughts on the Stonetop Discord: <https://discord.gg/wNE3Xky>
- ⦿ A number of chapters are missing because they are not yet in shareable form. Any updates to this playkit will be announced on the Discord.
- ⦿ All page number references are indicated by **XX**, because we won't know the proper page numbers until everything is in final layout. This means you'll need to find the pages yourself! Apologies for the inconvenience.

Happy gaming,
Jeremy, Lucie, and Jason

No one knows how the Stone got there, nor what the runes cut into its surface might mean. Few can even recount how the village sprang up around it. Most take the Stone for granted as the heart of their little settlement, an anchor that holds them fast at the edge of the known world. When a storm sweeps in across the Flats, the Stone pulls lightning from the clouds like—well, like nothing else at all. While outsiders might cower before this deafening display, the residents merely offer passing prayers to Tor, the Rain-Maker, and go about their business.

You are one of these, who call Stonetop home. One of a handful of notable figures who stand out—admired, respected (maybe even reviled) for one reason or another. If there's a problem in need of solving, or trouble brewing, people look to you for the solution. Or the cause. Or both.

And right now, as the first wildflowers show their heads among the windswept grasses beyond the Wall, there's trouble brewing. The world itself seems to be darkening, like the sky before those late-summer storms. Everyone can feel it. And some are afraid.

These are good people, your kith and kin. If you don't step up to protect them, who will?



Welcome to Stonetop

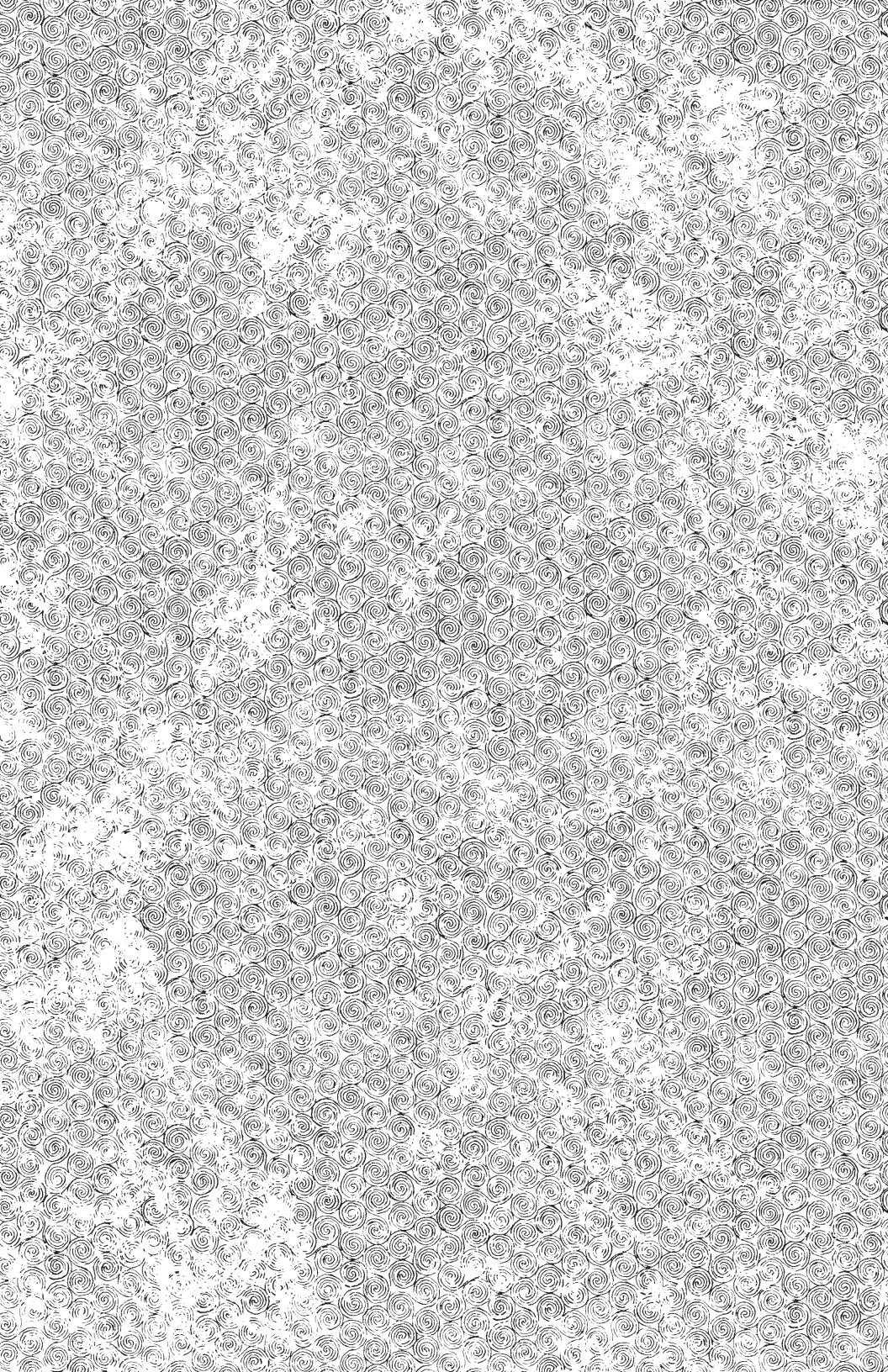
In order to play this game, you'll need three or more people, including you. One of them—probably you, since you're reading this book—will be game master, or GM. Everyone else is a player, each in charge of a player-character (PC) who's one of the notable figures mentioned in the intro at left.

Together, they're in charge of the village itself, which is kind of a character in its own right. The job of the players is to say what their characters do in the game world. As GM, you're the host and moderator: you'll lead the conversation, react to the players' decisions, and describe everything about the world that falls outside the purview of the PCs.

Stonetop is about the life of a small village and its people over many years. The game itself won't take *that* long to play, but it is designed to build and deepen over many sessions, each of which will be 2–4 hours in length. You can think of it like a TV series, developing over multiple episodes.

Once you've got your players together for your first session, you can start playing by following the step-by-step instructions in the **Getting Started** chapter on page **XX**. As GM though, before that first session, you'll need to familiarize yourself with the rules by reading through the first chapter of this book—**The Basics**, starting on the next page.





Getting Started



Get ready

Review the setting

Set expectations

Discuss tone and content

Create characters

Introduce the PCs

Let spring break forth

After the session

Getting Started

Get ready

Make sure that everyone is on board with the concept of *Stonetop*: that they'll play the heroes of a small, isolated village. If someone wants to play a rootless, treasure-hunting mercenary, they're unlikely to enjoy themselves, and that will drag down the game for everyone.

Prior to the first session, ask your players to read the **Setting Overview** handout, at least the first page. Encourage them to think about any content that they want to exclude, veil, or handle in a particular way (see page **XX**). Consider posting a shared document online where you and your players can record these things anonymously.

Set the expectation that the first session will mostly involve creating characters and the village itself. It's still *play*, and quite fun, but it's not the immersive, portraying-your-character type of play that they might expect. (This is different if you choose to use an adventure starter, see page **XX**.)

It's fine if players want to look over the character playbooks beforehand, but discourage anyone from making decisions just yet. Character creation should be done together, as a group.

As the GM, familiarize yourself with the Setting Overview, the **Steady playbook**, and the **Moves & Gear** handouts. You should have a sense of what each class playbook is about, but you don't need to understand them in depth. Look at a few of the **Major Arcana** and **Minor Arcana** handouts to get a sense for what they are and what they're like, but there's no need to study them in detail. If you have time, read through the rest of this book and the Setting Guide.

As far as physical preparation goes, beyond this book you'll need hard copies of the following:

- ⊙ 1 copy of each character playbook
- ⊙ 1 copy of the Steady playbook
- ⊙ 1-4 copies of the Setting Overview
- ⊙ 1-3 copies of the Moves & Gear handout (on colored paper if you can)
- ⊙ 1 copy of the Arcana cards
- ⊙ 1 copy of the GM playbook

Print the PDFs for these documents double-sided (flipped on the short edge).

After you've printed everything:

- 1) Staple the Stonetop Steady Playbook, Moves & Gear, and Setting Overview in the top left corner.
- 2) Fold the character playbooks into individual booklets.
- 3) Cut out the "inserts" and slip the class-specific inserts into their appropriate playbooks.
- 4) Keep the Inventory inserts stacked and handy. Set aside the Revenant, Ghost, and Thrall inserts.
- 5) Assemble the GM Playbook. Stack the sheets so that "Nearby Threats" is face-up. Fold all the pages over to make a booklet. Staple it along the spine.
- 6) If you have time, cut out all the Arcana cards, major and minor.

There's nothing secret in any of these documents, so if any of your players are around ask them to help with the folding, cutting and, stapling!

If you're playing electronically, you'll need to configure and distribute materials in whatever way works best for you, your players, and the platform that you're using to play. Make sure that everyone has access to electronic copies of:

- ⊙ The Stonetop Steading Playbook
- ⊙ The Setting Overview
- ⊙ The Moves & Gear handout
- ⊙ The character playbooks and inserts

Make the arcana handouts available individually, as needed.

For materials optimized for online play, visit lampblack-and-brimstone.com/stonetop.

Review the setting

Once you've gathered for the first session, **ask everyone to take 10-15 minutes to read the Setting Overview** handout. Do so even if everyone reviewed the handout in advance. It helps to refresh memories and get everyone on the same page.

When everyone's done, **ask the group what questions they have**. Answer to the best of your ability, inviting others to help. Note that some questions (like "Where *did* the Forest Folk go?") are mysteries that can only be answered in play.

Ask everyone what they find intriguing or exciting. What catches their imagination and makes them want to learn more? Take notes! Be sure to include these topics in the game.

Set expectations

Refer to the first page of the Setting Overview. **Ask everyone if they're comfortable with the players' agenda and principles**. Clarify and answer questions. Emphasize the importance of collaboration.

Explain that you have an agenda and principles, too. Specifically, your agenda is to:

- ⊙ Portray a rich and mysterious world
- ⊙ Punctuate their lives with adventure
- ⊙ Play to find out what happens

Make it clear that you'll be **fleshing out the world together**. There are no "official" answers to many of the questions raised by the Setting Guide. There are many blanks to filled in. You (the GM) have a setting guide, but it's mostly filled with *ideas* rather than *truths*.

Getting Started

Discuss tone and content

Talk to your group about **tone**: *Stonetop* takes itself seriously, grounding itself in human concerns. The PCs are exceptional, but they aren't super-human. Violence has consequences. Monsters are scary. Magic is strange and dangerous. People matter.

The setting, playbooks, and rules go a long way towards establishing a consistent tone, but **you and your players ultimately determine the game's tone in play**. Obviously, you can play the game however you want. You'll almost certainly have moments of levity and silliness—you're doing this for fun, after all—but *Stonetop* works best when everyone mostly plays it straight.

Next, discuss any **content that you and your players actively want to exclude, veil, or handle in a particular way**. Explain why this is important, reading or paraphrasing the following:

"This game is collaborative, with each of us contributing to the game's fiction. We each have our own tastes, sensibilities, and boundaries, which the others can't fully anticipate. So, before we start play, we're going to establish guidelines for the content that we'll include in the game. The goal is to make the game enjoyable, comfortable, safe, and welcoming for everyone, and that's more important than anyone's sense of realism or historical accuracy."

If someone strongly objects to establishing content guidelines, or refuses to respect the wishes, boundaries, and dignity of their fellow human beings, then consider whether you really want to spend hours and hours playing with them.

Grab the *Stonetop Steading Playbook* and find the section on Content. Explain the difference between excluded content and veiled content.

Excluded content just won't be in the game, period. For example, if "torture" is excluded, then PCs won't torture anyone; monsters and NPCs won't torture anyone; no one will threaten anyone with torture; no one will have torture as part of their backstory. No torture, not even off-camera.

Veiled content can be part of the game, but only off-camera. If "torture" is veiled, then PCs, NPCs, and monsters can all threaten to torture each other, or have been tortured in the past. PCs, NPCs, and monsters can commit torture, too, but if they do, you "fade to black" or "pan away" and the actual torture happens off-camera. You can—and probably should—address the aftermath of the torture on-camera, but skip the torture itself.

Excluded or veiled content can be broad ("slavery") or specific ("graphic depictions of harm to eyes"). It can be potentially upsetting ("torture"), or something that a player finds distasteful or mood-breaking ("punny names"), or even trivial ("NPCs named 'Sean'").

Start by sharing the content that you (the GM) want to exclude or veil, plus any such content that was shared with you in advance. Then give the players a few minutes to consider what (else) they want to exclude or veil. Ask for them to share, and note the content on the *steading* playbook.

If you suspect that some players will be shy about sharing, have the whole group write their excluded/veiled content on note cards, anonymously, and then hand them in (or send them to you via e-mail, chat, etc.).

Anyone can call for content to be excluded or veiled. If one player wants to exclude something that another player wants to veil, then that content is excluded.

It's fine to ask each other for clarification on what exactly is being excluded or veiled, but **don't ask for reasons**. Players can volunteer their reasons, but sometimes those reasons are private, unpleasant, or even traumatic and no one should be asked to unpack that for a game.

Let everyone know that **they can call for new content to be excluded or veiled at any time**, in this session, between sessions, or during future sessions. They don't need to speak now or forever hold their peace.

Finally, ask if anyone has **special requests** regarding specific content. Is there certain content that anyone wants to handle in a particular way? Are there any truths they want to assert about the world, the village, or the game? For example:

- ⊙ "Spiders are okay, but I need us to avoid describing their legs."
- ⊙ "I'm cool with bigotry between the Hillfolk and Gordin's Delve, but I want Stonetop to be an open-minded and welcoming place."
- ⊙ "I don't want the Stone to be some source of ancient evil."
- ⊙ "I want to play a woman Marshal, defying a woman's 'proper place!'"
- ⊙ "Let's say that gender norms in Stonetop are super fluid and accepting."

Discuss, negotiate, and compromise as needed, trying to find common ground that works for everyone, and note these special requests in the steading playbook.

Making corrections

Mistakes will happen. When excluded content comes up in play, or veiled content gets included on-screen, whoever notices should call "time out" and point out what happened. Don't make a big deal about it; acknowledge the mistake, fix the fiction if necessary, and move on.

Likewise, if anyone realizes mid-session that some particular content is bothering them, they can call a time out. Identify the content that needs to be handled differently (clarifying as needed, but not asking for reasons). Update the steading playbook. Fix the fiction. Check in with the player and make sure they're okay. When everyone's ready, continue.

If you or a player realize that you're uncomfortable with content that came up during a previous session, discuss it before the next session. Update the steading playbook and fix the fiction as needed.

"Fix the fiction" means: decide as a group what happened *instead*. This isn't meant to undo the consequences of players' rolls or decisions, but rather to bring the fiction back in line with the comfort level of the group.

If a player consistently ignores the group's content guidelines, talk to them about it between sessions. If they persist, stop playing with them.

Create characters

After your review the setting, set expectations, and establish content guidelines, it's time to make characters! Do this together, during the first session.

First, have everyone pick a character playbook. Refer to the "Setting at a Glance" handout for a quick overview of each, and discuss who would like to play which class. This will be much quicker and easier than reviewing the entirety of each playbook. If anyone is unsure, have them read the front page of the playbooks they are considering.

As each person makes their choice, hand them the appropriate playbook, along with any class-specific inserts. Everyone gets an Inventory insert as well. If someone chooses the Seeker, hand them the Major Arcana cards and tell them they'll need to choose one before play proper begins, as indicated by their playbook.

Ask each player to work through their playbook from front to back, making choices and filling in blanks as needed. Answer questions as they arise. Common questions at this stage include:

- ⑦ **Do I have to pick from these appearances?** No, they can make up something else. The appearances are there to spark their creativity.
- ⑦ **Do I have to pick one of these names?** No, but the name lists are meant to give the world a cohesive feel. The steading playbook includes extra names if they want to pick something else.
- ⑦ **Do I have to live in Stonetop?** Yes, at least for now. There are only two exceptions: a Blessed with the Raised by Wolves background and a Lightbearer with the Itinerant Mystic background. Even they should have close ties to the village, and be there often.
- ⑦ **How does "armor" work?** Their armor value is (usually) based on their current gear. Armor reduces any damage they take. Multiple items with "*x* armor" don't stack with each other, but items that grant "+*x* armor" do stack (with each other, and with "*x* armor" items). 0-1 armor is typical. 2 armor is tough. 3 armor is the best a starting character can get.
- ⑦ **What does ◇ or ◇◇ mean?** The item counts against their load. If they bring it on an expedition, they'll mark that many ◇ on their Inventory insert. They can mark up to 3 ♡ with a light load, up to 6 ♡ with a normal load, and up to 9 ♡ with a heavy load.

Items without a ◇ or ◇◇ are either *small* (they don't count against your load, but you typically carry only ~4 of them on each expedition) or something that you don't carry on your person. It should be obvious which.
- ⑦ **My background says "go mark this now." What does that mean?** If they take that background, they should open their playbook and mark that particular move, option, or special possession now (so that they don't forget to do so later).
- ⑦ **What does my instinct do?** It describes how their character tends to behave. Each session, they get XP if they demonstrate their instinct in play, or struggle against it.

- ☉ **Can I have a different special possession?** Sure, but keep it setting-appropriate and on par with the other options. Check other playbooks for inspiration.
- ☉ **Do I get any (other) weapons or gear?** Special possessions are the unique or interesting things that they own or have access to. Every character has access to common weapons, armor, and gear included on the Inventory insert. They shouldn't define their Inventory at the start of play. They'll do that when they first Outfit for an expedition.
- ☉ **How much damage do weapons do?** Damage is based on the playbook, not on the weapon. The Heavy deals 1d10 damage and the Lightbearer deals 1d4, regardless of whether they use a dagger or a maul. Some weapons of war deal "+1 damage," but that's an exception.

No, they don't add their STR (or DEX) to their damage rolls.
- ☉ **What do the various tags mean?** *Hand, close, reach, near, and far* describe a weapon or light source's useful range. From closest to furthest, the ranges are *hand < close < reach < near < far*.

Piercing weapons ignore some of the target's armor. *X piercing* means that the weapon's piercing value is equal to Stonetop's Prosperity (+0 by default).

Precise weapons let them use DEX to Clash (instead of STR).

Forceful, messy, awkward, reload, area, dangerous, and warm are fictional cues. They have no numeric effects, but they color the fiction—which is important!
- ☉ **What does "roll + [STAT]" mean?** They'll roll 2d6 and add the modifier they've assigned to that stat. If the total is a 10+, yay! If the total is 7-9, okay. If the total is 6-, uh-oh.
- ☉ **What happens if I roll a 6 or less?** If a move doesn't specify what happens on a 6-, then it means that the player marks XP and something bad happens. You (the GM) decide exactly what.
- ☉ **What does "advantage" mean?** They roll an extra die and discard the lowest. Usually, that means rolling 3d6 and keeping the 2 best dice. If they have "disadvantage," they roll an extra die and discard the highest (usually 3d6, keep the 2 worst). If they have advantage or disadvantage on a damage roll, they roll their damage die twice and keep the best/worst roll (and then add any bonus dice from moves).
- ☉ **Should I fill in the back page, too?** Yes. They should complete the left column of their playbook's back page, making choices or answering questions as they wish, within the content guidelines established by the group.

If you're using an adventure starter, (see page **XX**), you might have specific instructions for certain playbooks.

Getting Started

Introduce the PCs

Everyone should stop and wait at the **Introductions** section of their playbooks, which comprises the second column on the back page. They can read it over and think about answers to the questions, but shouldn't make any hard decisions until everyone's ready to do so as a group.

When all the players are at that point, set expectations: they'll take turns introducing themselves, adding details, asking and answering questions about each other and the setting as it develops through conversation.

While this happens, encourage them to...

- ⊙ **Pay attention:** take interest in what everyone else says.
- ⊙ **Ask and answer questions:** if they want to know more about something that comes up, ask. Answer questions asked of you honestly.
- ⊙ **Play off of each other:** incorporate details mentioned by others into your own contributions.

As GM, you'll ask a lot of questions, too. See the following pages for suggestions.

Whenever someone wants or needs to add a new NPC to the mix, suggest that they pick one of the unused names from the front of their playbook. Additional names are available in the steading playbook. Also give each NPC an occupation and trait.

Take notes! Add NPCs to the steading playbook as you go, or take more freeform notes for now and update the Residents of Stonetop and Notable Neighbors later.

Adventure starters

If you want to start an adventure right away, during the first session, then download an adventure starter from lamblack-and-brimstone.com.

Each starter presents abbreviated steps for character creation and introductions, and then launches into a specific adventure. The results won't be as unique or fleshed out as what you get with the standard process, but you'll get to the action more quickly!

1 Vital info

Choose someone to go first. They'll introduce themselves by name, pronouns, background (and playbook, if unclear), origin, and appearance.

Ask questions based on their class and background. Use the following questions as a guide, but of course ask whatever your curiosity demands. Encourage the other players to do so as well: "Anyone else curious about anything that was just mentioned?"

It's okay to leave blanks! If someone isn't sure about a detail, or doesn't want to decide just yet, that's fine. Make a note and come back to it later—or just leave it as an open question to be answered in play.

If their origin is someplace other than Stonetop, ask them the following (unless the answer is obvious):

- ⊙ What brought you (or your family) to Stonetop? Why here, specifically?
- ⊙ Who else, if anyone, came with you?
- ⊙ How long ago was this? Decades? Years? Months? Days?



The Blessed

Initiate

- ⊗ Who are your fellow initiates?
 - ⊗ How long ago were you initiated?
 - ⊗ How were you chosen? By lineage? By trial? By sign or omen?
 - ⊗ Did anyone else seek your role?
 - ⊗ What did initiation rites entail? Were they public or secret? Festive or somber?
 - ⊗ What do your duties as an initiate entail?
-

Raised by Wolves

- ⊗ Were you one of the Forest Folk? Stolen, lost, or abandoned? Something else?
 - ⊗ Did you grow up in the Great Woods? On the Flats? Somewhere else?
 - ⊗ What drew you to Stonetop? What ties you to the village?
 - ⊗ When did you first make yourself known to the village? How did that happen?
 - ⊗ Do you live in town? On the outskirts? In the Wood? How often do you visit?
-

Vessel

- ⊗ How did you gain or become aware of your power? When did this happen?
- ⊗ How has your life changed since gaining your powers?
- ⊗ Do you have a mentor? Or are you self taught, going by instinct and insight?
- ⊗ Do you hold some formal position as a servant of Danu?



The Fox

The Natural

- ⊗ What mundane craft, trade, or skill do you excel at, better than anyone?
 - ⊗ What well-earned reputation do you have?
 - ⊗ What lies get whispered behind your back?
 - ⊗ What secret do you know? About whom?
-

A Life of Crime

- ⊗ What criminal enterprise were you a part of? Who ran the show?
 - ⊗ How did you get into that life?
 - ⊗ How did you get out?
 - ⊗ Who or what did you leave behind?
 - ⊗ Who here knows about your past?
-

The Prodigal Returned

- ⊗ Why did you leave? How long ago?
- ⊗ Where did you go first? Why?
- ⊗ Where were you the longest?
- ⊗ What brought you home? When?
- ⊗ What has changed most while you were away?

Getting Started



The Heavy

Sheriff

- ⊗ Is this a formal position, or just something everyone agrees on?
- ⊗ How long have you acted as sheriff?
- ⊗ Who, if anyone, did this job before you?
- ⊗ Just where exactly did you learn how to fight so well?

Blood-Soaked Past

- ⊗ How did you earn your grim reputation?
- ⊗ What did people used to call you, back in your dark bloody days?
- ⊗ What prompted you to put all that behind you? When did that happen?
- ⊗ Who here knows about your past?
- ⊗ Who have you, personally, lost to violence?

Storm-Marked

- ⊗ When did the marks manifest? How?
- ⊗ Are they a symbol of your strength, speed, and courage? Or the source?
- ⊗ Are the marks a blessing? Or a curse?
- ⊗ How do folks in Stonetop generally treat you?



The Judge

Legacy

- ⊗ How long have you been the Judge? How long before that were you the apprentice?
- ⊗ Who was the Judge before you? Are they still alive?
- ⊗ How were you chosen as the prior Judge's apprentice?
- ⊗ What is the symbol of your authority (hammer, shield, or helm)? Where does the Chronicle say it come from?

Missionary

- ⊗ Where are you from, originally? Where did you do your apprenticeship?
- ⊗ How were you chosen as an apprentice?
- ⊗ How long were you an apprentice? How long have you been a full Judge?
- ⊗ Of the Judges in the other steadings (Reagan, Haeris, and Rahat)...
 - ...which was your mentor?
 - ...which was a fellow apprentice?
 - ...which is reliable but inflexible?
 - ...which is clever but ambitious?
 - ...which lacks the necessary mettle?
- ⊗ When did you arrive in Stonetop? How were you received?
- ⊗ Was there a prior Judge in Stonetop, or are you the first?
- ⊗ What is the symbol of your authority (hammer, shield, or helm)? Was it bestowed by your order, or did you find it?

Prophet

- ⊗ How did Aratis call you to her service?
- ⊗ What is the symbol of your authority (hammer, shield, or helm)? Where and how did you acquire it?
- ⊗ How did you establish yourself as Stonetop's Judge?



The Lightbearer

Auspicious Birth

- ☉ How was your birth marked by Helior?
 - ☉ How did your connection to Helior shape your youth?
 - ☉ Do you hold some formal position as a servant of Helior?
 - ☉ Who in town resents you, or at least what you represent?
 - ☉ Who in town is your most devoted disciple?
-

Itinerant Mystic

- ☉ What is it that keeps drawing you back to Stonetop?
 - ☉ Where else do you regularly travel to?
 - ☉ How long have you lived this wandering lifestyle?
 - ☉ Why is it that some folk from Stonetop are always so happy to see you?
 - ☉ Why is it that some folk from Stonetop can't wait to see you go?
-

Soul on Fire

- ☉ What sort of vice or iniquity once ruled your life?
 - ☉ What brought you so low, only to find succor in Helior's light?
 - ☉ Do you hold some formal position as a servant of Helior?
 - ☉ How have the people of Stonetop responded to your preaching?
-



The Marshal

Scion

- ☉ Who ran the militia before you?
 - ☉ When did you take charge?
 - ☉ Did anyone else want your position?
 - ☉ What is the nature of your crew? Why are they so respected?
 - ☉ How do you recruit or initiate members?
-

Penitent

- ☉ Where did you and your crew operate, before? What kind of bloody business did you all get up to?
 - ☉ What caused you to set that life aside?
 - ☉ Did any of your old crew refuse to join you? Last you heard, what are they up to?
 - ☉ Who spoke on your behalf when you first arrived? Who still doesn't trust you?
 - ☉ Did you take over Stonetop's militia from someone else? How'd that go?
 - ☉ How well has your crew integrated into Stonetop?
-

Luminary

- ☉ Are you touched by the gods? Does ancient blood flow in your veins? Or are you just the one who stepped up when needed?
 - ☉ When and how did it become clear that you were a natural leader?
 - ☉ When did you take charge of the militia?
 - ☉ Who, if anyone, ran the militia before you?
 - ☉ What is the nature of your crew?
 - ☉ How do you recruit or initiate members?
-

Getting Started



The Ranger

Mighty Hunter

- ⊗ How long have you plied the Wood? Who first taught you their ways?
- ⊗ Did you ever meet the Forest Folk, before they disappeared? Where do you think they went?
- ⊗ What deed are you most renowned for?

Wide Wanderer

- ⊗ What drives you to wander, when others stay safely at home?
- ⊗ Why do you call Stonetop home? Why do you always return here?
- ⊗ Of the folks you added to the list of neighbors (Tirny, Eser, etc.)...
...which one wants you dead?
...which one is always glad to see you?
...which one owes you a life debt?
- ⊗ What's one place you've always wanted to visit, but have never been?

Beast-Bonded

- ⊗ What type of beast is your companion? What's its name? Tell us about it!
- ⊗ How long ago did you bond with your companion, and how did it happen?
- ⊗ What special power do you have with your animal companion?
- ⊗ Who in town does your companion adore?
- ⊗ Who in town does your companion terrify?



The Seeker

Patriot

- ⊗ What grim event convinced you that Stonetop and the people you love are in danger?
- ⊗ Who else knows about your arcana and the powers you tamper with?
- ⊗ How did you learn so much of the Things Below, and your other area of expertise?

Antiquarian

- ⊗ How did you learn so much of the Makers, and your other area of expertise?
- ⊗ What do other scholars claim the Stone really is? What do you think, instead?
- ⊗ What convinced you that Stonetop holds the key to your greatest discoveries?
- ⊗ What is it you hope to find here? What is it that keeps you here?

Witch Hunter

- ⊗ What set you on the path of hunting evil?
- ⊗ What have you sacrificed, walking this path?
- ⊗ How did you come to be so well versed in your chosen subjects?
- ⊗ Why do you (still) call Stonetop home?



The Would-Be Hero

Impetuous

- ⊗ What was your first taste of danger and excitement?
- ⊗ What do you dream of becoming?
- ⊗ What hero of old do you idolize?
- ⊗ Who have you let down the most?

Drive

- ⊗ What happened to set you down this path?
- ⊗ When and where did this happen?
- ⊗ What was your life like before then?

Destined

- ⊗ What are the elements of your destiny?
- ⊗ How and when was your destiny (or what you know of it) revealed to you?
- ⊗ Is your destiny a curse? A blessing? Do you even believe in it?
- ⊗ Who knows about your destiny? How much? How much do they believe?

2 Special possessions

The next step is to establish each character's special possessions, and how they contribute to the village. During this round, you're trying to figure out where the PCs fit into daily life.

Almost everyone in Stonetop helps in the fields, at least during spring planting and fall harvest. Most of the crops (beans, potatoes, barley) get stored in the granary and doled out as needed. Folks keep their own homes, with gardens and small livestock.

A dozen or so folks ply the Great Wood. There are only a few full-time craftsfolk: a publican, a cobbler, a tanner, a smith, and a midwife. Other crafts (carpentry, pottery, weaving, etc.) get done on the side, by whoever has the skills and the tools. Most trade is based on barter, debt, and honor.

Have the players go around and share their special possessions and how they earn their keep. Most players will naturally tie their possessions into how they contribute to the village, but if they don't, press them on it.

Ask the questions below, plus whatever else you're curious about. Take notes, and update the steading playbook as needed.

Smithy or tannery

- ⊗ Are you the town's smith/tanner, or their apprentice, or what?
- ⊗ How long have you been doing this? How'd you get started?

Tools (carpenter's, husbandry, etc.)

- ⊗ Do you earn your keep with these tools? Or is it something you do on the side?
- ⊗ Where did you get them? How did you learn to use them?

Apiary, aviary, chandlery, goat herd, glassworks, or herb garden

- ⊗ How big is it? And where?
- ⊗ Is it yours? Yours to manage? Or what?
- ⊗ How long has it been in Stonetop?
- ⊗ What's its importance to the village?

Distillery

- ⊗ Are you the publican? Or related to them?
- ⊗ How long have you been doing this?
- ⊗ How good is your stuff? Whose is better?

Anything else

- ⊗ How did you come to possess that? When?
- ⊗ What do others know/think about it?
- ⊗ What does it mean to you? To the town?

Finally, ask everyone:

- ⊗ Can you read and write? If so, who taught you, and when?

Getting Started

World building

The next round has each player describe the specific choices they've made in the left column on the back of their playbook. Each playbook has a different set of prompts and questions.

This step helps your group develop their specific version of the *Stonetop* world. The nature of the gods, the village's history, and more might get established. As players reveal details about their characters and the setting, take more notes and ask more questions. Pay particular attention to any threats or tensions that they introduce. These will become very important soon!

Here are some things to ask each character. You don't have to ask them all, and you certainly aren't limited to these.



The Blessed

Sacred Pouch

- ☉ How did you get your sacred pouch? What's it made from, and how is it adorned?

The Earth Mother

- ☉ Is Danu generally worshipped, avoided, petitioned, or appeased?
- ☉ Why do the villagers leave the offerings that they do? Why are these things sacred to Danu? What do they symbolize?
- ☉ How is Danu's worship different among other peoples? Do her chosen (like you) recognize any sort of fellowship?



The Fox

Tall Tales

- ☉ Where did this happen? When? Who was with you? How exactly did you ___?
- ☉ Sure, that's what you tell everyone, but what really happened?



The Heavy

A History of Violence

- ☉ For each of the things that everyone talks about: When did this happen? Where were you? What prompted it? Who was with you? How exactly did you ___?
- ☉ For each thing that folks are less keen to discuss: What's the story, there? Who, what, where, and when?
- ☉ For the things keeping them up at night: Who else have you shared this with? Who are you keeping it from?



The Judge

The Chronicle

- ☉ How was the Chronicle built/discovered?
- ☉ Who all is welcome in the Chronicle?
- ☉ Why is the Chronicle located where it is?
- ☉ If the Chronicle is haunted: Whose spirit(s) do you think they are? How often do they appear?
- ☉ If the Chronicle contains dangerous artifacts: What do they look like? How do you know they're dangerous? Who else knows about them? How did they get there?

The Lawkeeper

- ☉ How many true disciples of Aratis are present in Stonetop? Just a handful? A sizeable minority? A majority?
- ☉ How do Aratis's true disciples feel about the reverence of other gods?
- ☉ What was the most recent dispute you've been called on to settle? How did you rule?



The Lightbearer

Praise the Day

Ask them about any apparent contradictions. For example, if the worship of Helior is widely persecuted but his shrine in Stonetop is given the place of highest honor... how do they explain that?

- ☉ Why does Helior's proper worship consist of the things that it does? Why do those things please him so?
- ☉ Do Helior's worshippers abroad recognize you as the appointed servant that you are?
- ☉ What was the previous Lightbearer called? When did they live and die?
- ☉ Were there other Lightbearers before them?
- ☉ Which invocations do you know?



The Marshal

War Stories

Ask for details. Drill down on their answers to fill in any gaps in your sense of what happened.

- ☉ Would you call it a victory, a defeat, or a draw?
- ☉ What part did your crew play? What part did you play?
- ☉ How do you think it would it have gone, had you not been there?
- ☉ What are your crew's tags, instinct, and cost? Who are these people? (No need to name each one just yet, but who are they in general or as a group?)



The Ranger

Something Wicked This Way Comes

Ask for details, but leave some questions unanswered. The threat should feel mysterious, at least at the outset.

- ☉ Where exactly did this happen? When?
- ☉ Why do you think that?



The Seeker

Collection

Ask about their major arcana, the minor arcana that have unlocked, and the minor arcana they have not yet mastered:

- ☉ How long have you had it/known about it?
- ☉ Who else knows about it?
- ☉ Where is it/where do you keep it?
- ☉ When did you (start to) unlock its secrets?
- ☉ What do you hope to accomplish with it?



The Would-Be Hero

Fear & Anger

- ☉ From whence does this fear come?
- ☉ When did you first experience it?
- ☉ What is the source of your anger? Why does ____ fill you with righteous fury?

Getting Started

4 5 NPC connections

The next step creates more connections between the PCs and NPCs in the village. Go around and on each player's turn, have them pick any one question from step 4, answering it with the name of one or more NPCs who live in Stonetop.

Ask follow-up questions as they occur to you ("Owena is your wife—do you have any kids?" "You're secretly watching over Gerlt? Why?") Encourage the players to ask each other questions as well.

Players can invent new NPCs or reuse NPCs previously established. If they introduce a new NPC, suggest that they pick a name from the unused choices on their playbook.

Add new NPCs to the Notables list on the Stonetop Steading Playbook. Assign each one an occupation and a trait. (Alternately, just take notes for now and add them to the playbook later.)

Once everyone has gone once, repeat the process. This time, though, the players can pass instead of answering another question. Keep going until everyone has passed.

Before you move on to step 6, **ask each PC the following** (unless the answers are already clear):

- ⊗ Are you married? Single? Betrothed? Widowed? Any kids?
- ⊗ Are your parents still alive? Your grandparents? Siblings?

6 7 PC connections

In step 6, the players start to flesh out the relationships between their PCs.

The first player picks a question from step 6, and asks it aloud to the other players. Anyone can answer "me," and the asking player writes their name down in the space provided. Then, the next player goes, and the next. Repeat until everyone has gone.

If no one bites on a particular question, talk it through. Encourage the others to really consider it, but don't force someone to say "me." If no one bites, have the player ask a different question.

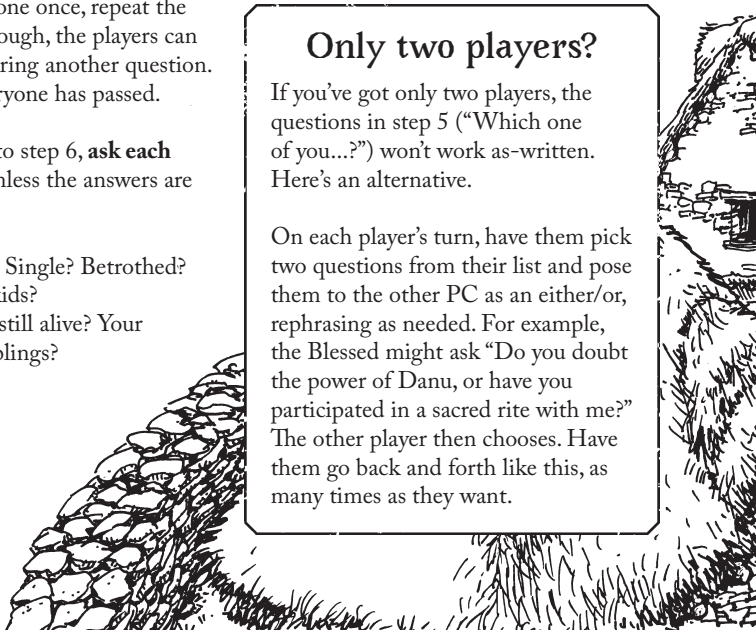
As always, ask follow-up questions to flesh out the details. "So, Ari, you've been with Vahid the entire way, huh? You met back in Lygos, then. What brought you together?"

When everyone has gone once, repeat the process, with each player asking another question or passing. When everyone has passed, move on.

Only two players?

If you've got only two players, the questions in step 5 ("Which one of you...?") won't work as-written. Here's an alternative.

On each player's turn, have them pick two questions from their list and pose them to the other PC as an either/or, rephrasing as needed. For example, the Blessed might ask "Do you doubt the power of Danu, or have you participated in a sacred rite with me?" The other player then chooses. Have them go back and forth like this, as many times as they want.



8

Homes

Finally, find the Stonetop Steading Playbook. On the first page, add a point of interest for each PC's home. Ask questions, such as...

- ⊗ Who do you live with? Family? By yourself? Do any of you live together?
- ⊗ Why is your home there, as opposed to somewhere else?
- ⊗ Where do your parents/grandparents/siblings/etc. live?
- ⊗ Where is the smith/tannery/Chronicle/aviary/chandlery/etc.?

Also, add any new points of interest to the appropriate maps. For example, if the Seeker knows the location of some creepy carvings in a limestone cave, in the cliff face a few miles north of town, then add it to the Vicinity map.

Once you've updated the maps, it's time to **let spring break forth.**



Let spring break forth

Ask the players to decide whose character is the most hopeful. Refer them to the Seasons Change move on the Moves & Gear handout (on the third page, under Homefront Moves). Tell them that spring has just broken forth upon the land, and ask them to roll +Fortunes (+1, in this case).

On a 10+, ask them to choose one of these:

- ⊗ Interesting news
- ⊗ Valuable insight
- ⊗ Trade opportunity

You're looking for a plot hook, something to kick off the first adventure. The other choices (Danu's blessing or unexpected bounty) don't provide that sort of hook.

On a 7-9, have them choose whatever gain they like. You'll combine that with a threat to create your starting situation.

On a 6-, chuckle grimly and start thinking about threats.

Make a note of the result, and update the steading playbook if needed. Then start to wrap up. It'll be tempting to jump into character and start playing right away, but don't do it. You need to time to think about everything the players have given you and prepare the first adventure.

Before you go, ask the players:

- ⊗ What excites you the most about playing your character?

Whatever they tell you, write it down. Try to work it into the first adventure.

After the session

You've got a pile of NPCs, relationships, events, and details. Now you need to turn them into something coherent and useful for both you and your players. You also need to plan the first adventure.

Organize your notes

Take some time to update the Residents of Stonetop and the Notable Neighbors sections of the steading playbook. Include each NPC who was established, with their occupation, connection(s) to the PCs or other NPCs, and perhaps a notable trait. (You can leave the trait off for now, and ask the players about them in play.)

Space on the steading playbook is limited and the playbook can be hard to update in play. Also, you might have notes about NPCs that you don't want the players to see. Consider recording your NPCs on a spreadsheet or other electronic document. lampblack-and-brimstone.com/stone-top includes an example.

If you're a visual thinker, **consider making a relationship map**. Each "node" on the map represents a character (PC or NPC). Cluster characters together by location (Stonetop residents here, Hillfolk there) and further cluster them by affiliation (the Initiates of Danu, the Marshal's crew, etc.). Draw lines between characters and groups, with a note describing the relationship (like "mother/daughter," "budding romance," or "watching closely"). A relationship map helps you and your players "see" the social landscape of the game, but it requires a lot of work to create and maintain.

Create a timeline, arranging the events that your players established from oldest to most-recent.

As you organize your notes, you'll find contradictions like "Vahid got here last year, but Blodwen was initiated two years ago—he couldn't have participated in the initiation rites!" Either ask the players about them (before or at the start of the next session) or just make a decision about how to correct the contradiction if you think it's a low-impact change.

You'll also **spot potential connections** that you missed during Introductions. For example, if Rhianna started running the militia five years ago, after her predecessor was killed fighting bandits, then you might think, "It'd be interesting if those bandits were Brennan and his Claws, who now run the watch in Marshedge." If you're okay with just deciding that this is true, add it to your NPC notes and/or timeline. If you think it *might* be true, but aren't sure, then add it to your "I wonder..." list.

Share your updated list of NPCs and your timeline with the players. Ask them to review it before the next session, to help get everyone on the same page. Point out any lingering questions for them to answer, and any changes that you've made. Ask for feedback, and incorporate it as appropriate.

Identify threats

Look over your notes again and identify the sources of trouble or ongoing problems for the PCs or the village. **Write these up as threats** (see page **XX**), to whatever level of detail makes sense right now.

If your notes imply a threat, but the threat's nature isn't entirely clear, add it to your "I wonder..." list.

"I wonder..."

Keep a running list of open questions—things that you wonder about, but either...

... you don't know how to answer yet, or
... you want to leave unanswered for now
and see it get answered through play.

"I wonder... what *did* happen to the Forest Folk? What *was* that thing Vahid faced when he got the Mindgem? What exactly *is* making the crinwin so bold?"

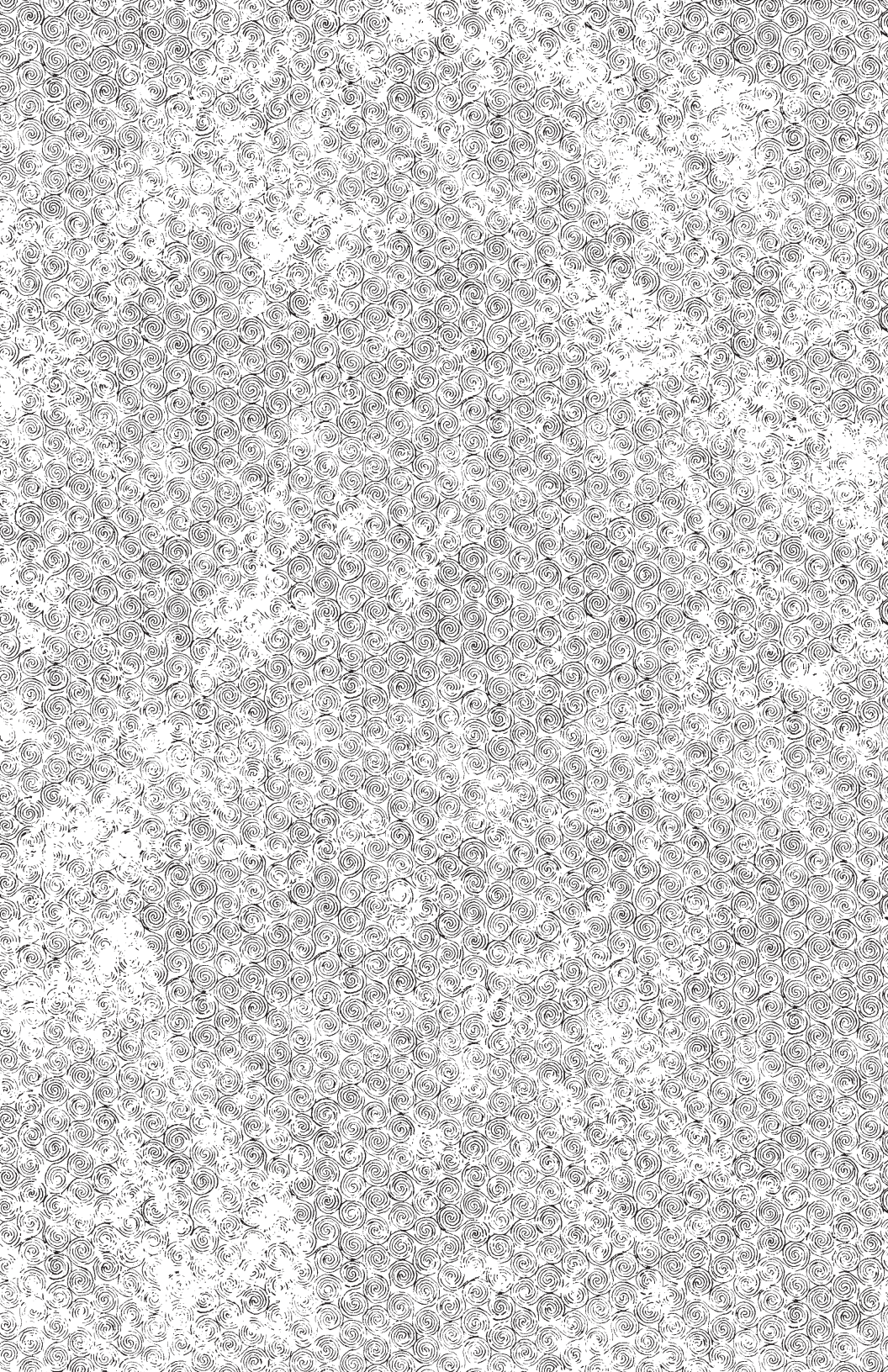
Refer to these questions **as you prepare adventures**. Use the list to help identify the adventure's central opportunity or threat, or to help write the setup questions that you'll ask the characters.

Refer to this list **during your sessions**, when you need something interesting to say. Can you say something that answers one of these questions? Or that hints at the answer? Can you turn one of these questions back on the characters, and ask them to give you the answers?

Update these questions between sessions. If a question has been answered, remove it. If a new question occurs to you, add it to the list.

Plan the first adventure

Look at your notes, your threats, your "I wonder..." list, and the results of the that first Seasons Change roll and use them to prepare your first adventure. See page **XX** for guidance.



Running Stonetop



Your agenda
The core loop
The spotlight
Scenes & loose play
Your GM moves
Your principles
Other things to do
GMinig is a practice
Prep

Running Stonetop

There are dozens of ways to GM a role-playing game. There's a particular way to run *Stonetop*. This is how. The rest of the game is built on this approach.

Remember: **the game is a conversation**. You'll say things, the other players will say things. You'll ask each other questions, interrupt, talk over each other. The game's rules kick in at particular moments and show us where the conversation goes.

As the GM, you have a special role in the conversation. **It's your job to describe the world, say what happens, and portray monsters and NPCs**. You'll facilitate and make rulings. You'll ask for input. You'll frame scenes and point the spotlight. The game invests you, the GM, with a lot of power—and a lot of responsibility.

Your agenda

These are your goals when running *Stonetop*:

- ⊙ Portray a rich and mysterious world
- ⊙ Punctuate the characters' lives with adventure
- ⊙ Play to find out what happens

Everything you say and do as the GM is meant to support these three goals, and no others. It's *not* your agenda (for example) to challenge the players' skill, or to provide "fair" fights, or to punish the characters. It's absolutely not your agenda to control the players or force "your" story to go the way you think it should. When in doubt, ask yourself: **this thing you're considering doing, which of these three goals does it support?** If the answer is "none of them," then don't do it. Do something else.

Your first goal is to **portray a rich and mysterious world**: alive and breathing, filled with detail and humanity and depth. Mundane concerns—crops, trade, weather, the opinions of your neighbors—are important. Fantastic elements are important, too, but they are strange and scary and poorly understood. The past sleeps unquietly. Questions abound.

Your second goal is to **punctuate the characters' lives with adventure**. The PCs have lives to live, homes to take care of, families to feed. They have demands on their time. Your job is to make that stuff matter, but also to interrupt it with threats and opportunities that only the PCs can (or will) address. Adventures will occupy the bulk of the *players'* time, but they shouldn't occupy the bulk of the *characters'* time.

Finally, most importantly, **play to find out what happens**. It's your job to portray a rich and mysterious world, to threaten that which the PCs care about or dangle opportunities, and then to see where things go from there. You'll make plans, yes. You'll make preparations. But once play begins, it's your job to follow where the players lead, where the dice lead, and where the fiction leads.

And the reward is this: to be genuinely surprised by the story that—naturally, organically, magically—unfolds. A tale you could never weave by yourself.

The core loop

When you run this game, this is what you *do*. There's more to it, of course, but this is the underlying structure of the conversation between you and the players.

1) Establish the situation

- ⊙ Frame the action
- ⊙ Describe the environment
- ⊙ Give details and specifics
- ⊙ Ask questions, ask for input
- ⊙ Portray NPCs and monsters
- ⊙ Answer questions, clarify

2) Make a soft GM move

Provoke action and/or increase tension.

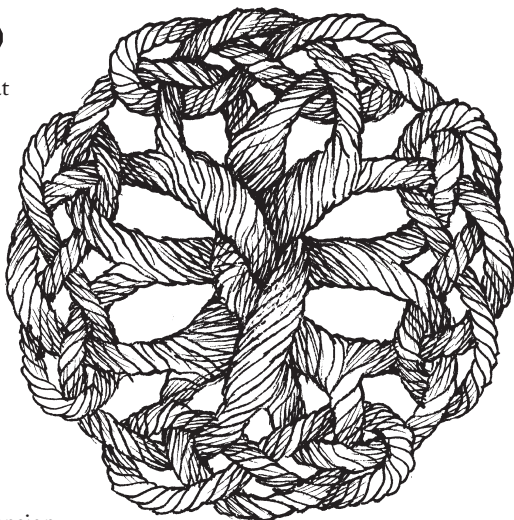
3) Ask "What do you do?"

4) Resolve their actions

- ⊙ If they trigger a player move, do what the move says.
- ⊙ If they roll a 6- or they ignore trouble, make a hard GM move (establish badness).
- ⊙ Otherwise, say what happens.

5) Repeat

- ⊙ Is the situation clear and grabby? Can the PC(s) act? Back to step 3.
- ⊙ Is the situation clear, but escalating before the PCs act? Back to step 2.
- ⊙ Is the situation clear, but needs a nudge? Back to step 2.
- ⊙ Is the situation unclear? Does it need recapping or updating? Back to step 1.
- ⊙ Is the current scene or situation over? Wrap up, look for the next one. Back to step 1.



In practice, the conversation is fluid, messy, and chaotic. It'll be interrupted by questions about rules and fictional details. Players will kibbitz and joke, discuss options, or play out scenes with each other in-character. You'll often juggle two or more "loops" of conversation at a time, jumping between players whose characters are each up to their own thing.

But beneath it all is this structure, this loop. If you ever feel lost, and you aren't sure what to do or say next, then figure out where you are in this loop and go from there.

Now, let's look at each step in detail.

Running Stonetop

1 Establish the situation

It's your job to establish the situations that the PCs find themselves in. Do any or all of the following, as needed, in whatever order makes sense.

Frame the action

Determine **who, where, and when**.

Address one or more of the PCs and say (or ask) where they are. Say (or ask) who else is there. Say (or ask) when this is happening (the season, the time of day, how long after the last scene or situation).

Describe the environment

For a place you haven't seen "on camera" before, say (or ask) what it's like. For a place that you've seen before, say (or ask) how it's changed (if at all).

Include up to 3 strong impressions from different senses—the shocking red of blood on snow, the crackling fire in the hearth, the smell of rain and wet earth. Sometimes include emotional impressions (the tension in the room, the grief on their faces) or moral impressions (the dirty, desperate beggars contrasted with the finely-dressed, well-fed gentry).

Focus on what matters. If they're at the public house, focus on the people there, the noise, and the *feel*. If they're exploring a ruin, focus on space, footing, sight, and sound. Keep it short, no more than 3 impressions to start. Players will zone out if you give them too much, and they'll ask for more detail where they need or want it. You want punchy and evocative, not flowery. Hemingway, not Tolkien.

Give details and specifics

Say (or ask) what's happening. Who's doing what? Where is everyone relative to each other? What can the characters see, hear, and sense?

Again, focus on what matters. In a social situation, focus on people: who's there, how they look, how they're acting. If they're exploring a ruin, focus on the environment. In an action scene, focus on the terrain and the combatants, their position, and their momentum.

Include the occasional non-essential detail. In a social scene, mention how the food tastes or how the room feels. In a fight scene, throw in a smell or something that an enemy is wearing. This sort of extra detail can add real texture to the situation.

Use maps, props, and comparisons to convey space and relationships. Sketch the room. Use tokens or meeples. Refer to real-world spaces ("He's about where Bob is, relative to you."). Similes and metaphors are your friends!

Improvisation & prep

Yes, you're making all this stuff up (or asking the players to). You'll do some prep in advance (see page **XX**) or pull from the setting guide, but during play you improvise many of the specifics.

Once a detail is established, treat it like it's been true all along. Build and riff on it. Look for connections. Ask yourself the obvious questions and decide on the (probably obvious) answers. Weave it all together into a rich, mysterious world.

Ask questions

You don't have to provide all the details yourself. One of your principles (page **XX**) is to **ask questions and build on the answers**. Invite the players to contribute to the scene by asking their characters about stuff that they know, feel, or have experienced. "Caradoc, what's the most overwhelming smell in the tannery?" Or "Vahid, you've been to this pool before. What's it look like? Describe it for us."

Ask questions about what the characters are feeling or experiencing. Don't ask them to make up the key details, but maybe prompt them for a detail that fits a theme. "Rhianna, what feature jumps out at you about this bandit? Like, what sets him apart from the others?" Or "Blodwen, what here makes this place feel cozy and safe?"

Ask questions about what they're doing and what they're up to, about how they spend their time and who they hang out with, etc. When they're on an expedition, ask for their marching order. When they Make Camp, ask them what they're eating, what the campsite is like, who takes which watch, etc.

Ask questions about what they're thinking and what they're feeling. "Vahid, what's on your mind?" "Rhianna, what's got you the most worried right now?"

Portray NPCs and monsters

If there are non-player characters (NPCs) involved, describe them. Say what they're doing. If the PCs interact with them, say how the NPCs respond. Speak in their voice and say what they say. If that's daunting for you, or you just want to cut to the chase, then *describe* what they say rather than actually saying it.

If the situation includes monsters—beasts, spirits, crinwin, and the like—then portray them, too. Describe them: how big they are, how they move, what they sound and smell like. Say what they do, what they're focused on. Say how they respond to the PCs.

Answer questions, clarify

The players will interrupt you and ask questions. Be honest and generous with truth and detail. If the answer wouldn't be clear to the PCs, say so and tell them what it'd take to figure that out (a soft GM move, page **XX**). Your job is to **portray a rich and fantastic world**, not to make them jump through hoops and figure out what you're thinking.

Sometimes, the players will say something that indicates a misunderstanding of the situation. "I slice the back of his leg," the Fox says, when you pictured the violence happening on the other side of the public room with the PCs watching. When that sort of thing happens, **clarify the situation with the players**. Explain how you see things, but also be willing to adjust your sense of the situation to match theirs. "Huh? No, this is happening on the other side of the pub. I don't think you'd have let it get to this point if you were right there, do you?"

Running Stonetop

2 Make a soft GM move

The situation is clear? Good. Now, make a soft GM move—say something to **provoke action** and/or **increase tension**. Pick one of your GM moves (see page **XX**) and do that.

To provoke action: say that something bad is about to happen, or is in the process of happening, but **give the PCs a chance to do something about it**. “As your hand finds your knife-hilt, the crinwin is like ‘hiissssss’ and leaps, fingers going for your throat, what do you do?”

You can also provoke action by **offering them an opportunity**, or by presenting options and **prompting them to pick**. “Okay, it tumbled past you. It’s surprised and you’ve got a moment. You could jump on its back and try to stab it. Or get out of there. What do you do?”

In a social scene, your NPCs might ask for something or demand something. They might say something vulnerable or emotional and then look at the PC, expecting them to react.

Soft moves don’t always provoke action. Sometimes, they **just crank up the tension**. You might use up their stuff, foreshadow trouble, or add trouble to a scene in a way that can’t be acted on right away. “You’ve been down here for a while, your torches are starting to get low.” Or “There’s another tremor. A bit of dirt falls from the ceiling. What do you do?”

3 “What do you do?”

After you make a soft GM move, ask “**What do you do?**” This hands the conversation back to the player(s) and prompts them to say something.

You don’t have to literally say, “What do you do?” Sometimes, your move will include a question. When portraying an NPC, you might make your move and just look at the players expectantly. But if you’re unsure, ask: “What do you do?”

If they say something that doesn’t make sense—something you think is impossible, invalid, or unreasonable—then tell them that. Clarify the fiction. If they persist, **tell them the consequences and/or requirements**. Ask if they still want to do it.

If they ask questions, answer them. If the answers aren’t obvious, **tell them the requirements**. “You’ll have to poke around a bit and Seek Insight.” Then put the ball back in their court: “What do you do?”

Players jumping in

Players might seize the initiative and declare an action before you ask “What do you do?” or even before you’ve made a soft GM move. Great! It means they’re engaged, and the situation is grabby enough that they want to act on it. You can jump straight to resolving their action.

With that said: don’t let players dominate the conversation. If you’re in the middle of making a move, or think that something would happen before they could act, or want to give someone else a chance to act, then tell them to hold their horses!

4 Resolve their action

The player says what their character does. Establish how the situation changes, or what their action reveals about the situation.

Did they trigger a player move? If so, which one? Resolve that move. If you aren't sure whether they triggered a move, or you need more info before resolving it, ask questions. Clarify their intent and/or how they're going about it. Discuss with the table.

When a player triggers a move, then **follow the move's procedures**. Reveal whatever information the move entitles them to. Work with the player to establish how the situation has changed. (See page **XX** for more detail.)

When a player's move prompts you to add something to the fiction, and you're not sure what to say, then **look to your GM moves for inspiration** (page **XX**).

If they trigger a move and roll a 6-, then they mark XP and you make a hard GM move (unless the move specifically says otherwise).

If they do something that doesn't trigger a player move, then they're looking to you to see what happens. **Did they ignore a threat or trouble** that you warned about previously? Make a hard GM move.

Otherwise, say what happens and how that changes the situation. Maybe just say "Okay" and then either shift the spotlight (page **XX**) or say "Then what do you do?"

Hard GM moves

Make a hard GM move when a PC...

- ... ignores a threat or trouble entirely; or
- ... triggers a move but rolls a 6- (and the move doesn't say otherwise).

Making a hard GM move means that you **establish badness**. Describe the consequences of the PC's actions. Say how things go wrong. Make the situation significantly worse. Pick a GM move from your lists (page **XX**) or just say the obvious bad thing. "Ooh, a 5, huh? It's too fast! Before your knife clears the sheath, it's on you, **WHOOMP**, take a d6 damage and you're on your back, one of its claws is on your throat and the other is pinning your knife-hand by the wrist, what do you do?"

When they roll a 6-, your hard move will often involve the PC's action failing. Say (or ask) how it goes wrong and/or what the consequences are. **But a 6- doesn't always mean that the PC's action fails**. It means you establish badness. Maybe something bad happens before they can do their thing; maybe they do what they set out to do, but that causes (or reveals) something very bad indeed. The badness might not even be directly connected to the action they took—it could simply follow directly on its heels.

A hard move should always establish badness, but **you decide just how bad it is**. Use the situation, the fiction, the description of the player's actions, and so forth to inform your hard moves. Sometimes, a hard move isn't much worse than a soft one.

Running Stonetop

5 Repeat

You've resolved the PC's actions. The situation is changed, or further revealed, and play snowballs from there.

If the situation is clear and grabby, and one or more PCs are in position to act, then jump straight back to step 3 and ask them, "What do you do?"

If the situation is clear, but things will escalate before the PCs are able to act, then jump back to step 2. Make a soft GM move to show how things are changing. Then ask, "What do you do?"

Likewise, **if the situation is clear but kind of static,** and the players need a nudge, then jump back to step 2. Make a soft GM move and ask, "What do you do?"

If the situation is unclear, or if it needs recapping or updating, then go back to step 1. Re-establish the situation. Then make a soft GM move and ask, "What do you do?"

If the current scene or situation is over, then wrap things up. Take care of logistics, bookkeeping and other metagame stuff. Figure out what the next situation or scene is, and then go back to step 1. Establish the (new) situation, make a soft GM move, and ask, "What do you do?"

Resolve their actions. See how the situation changes. Repeat. This is the core loop of the game.



The spotlight

As you play the game, you'll change who you're addressing, moment to moment. Whoever you're talking to right now is in **the spotlight**.

Sometimes you'll keep the spotlight unfocused and address the group as a whole. Often, you'll focus it on just one character. When lots of action is happening simultaneously, you swing it back and forth between individuals and groups.

There's no formal process for managing the spotlight. **The most obvious time to move the spotlight is after you resolve a PC's action.** Address a different character and describe the situation *to them*. Make a soft move *at them*. Ask *them*, "What do you do?"

You can, however, move the spotlight whenever it makes sense. For example, if you ask "What do you do?" and...

- ... **the player freezes or stalls**, then shift to someone else, giving the first player time to think. Come back to them later; or...
- ... **the PC does something that will take time**, then shift to someone else. Come back to the first PC as they finish (or as something interrupts them); or...
- ... **they make a move and you're not sure how to resolve it**, then buy yourself time to think by shifting to someone else. Come back to resolve the first player's move later.

Use the spotlight to be a good facilitator. Keep everyone involved. Make sure everyone gets some good screen time and has a chance to contribute.

It's okay if players interrupt each other, or kibitz, or have their characters act "out of order." Some moves (like Defend) give them explicit permission to do so!

With that said: don't be afraid to shut down an overly eager or aggressive player with a polite-yet-firm reprimand. "Andrew, you're being rude. I'm talking to Jamie right now."

Split the party

It's going to happen. The PCs will split up—intentionally or because you **separate them** or **capture someone**—and now you've got two smaller groups. It's okay. Splitting the party can be a lot of fun.

Splitting the party means that you're juggling multiple conversations and scenes at once. Move the spotlight back-and-forth between the different scenes, the way a film editor smash-cuts between scenes in a movie.

Don't linger too long on one group. Try to keep everyone involved and interested in what's going on in the other scenes. You might cut between scenes on every "action" or player move, or resolve a few "loops" of conversation between each cut. There's a rhythm and an art to this, and different types of scenes benefit from different approaches. Exploration and dialogue benefit from longer cuts. High-tension, high-action scenes work well with short, quick cuts and lots of cliffhangers.

Scenes and loose play

During play, the conversation will naturally shift between scenes and loose play. This isn't a formal distinction, or even always a conscious one. You'll often shift between them naturally and instinctively.

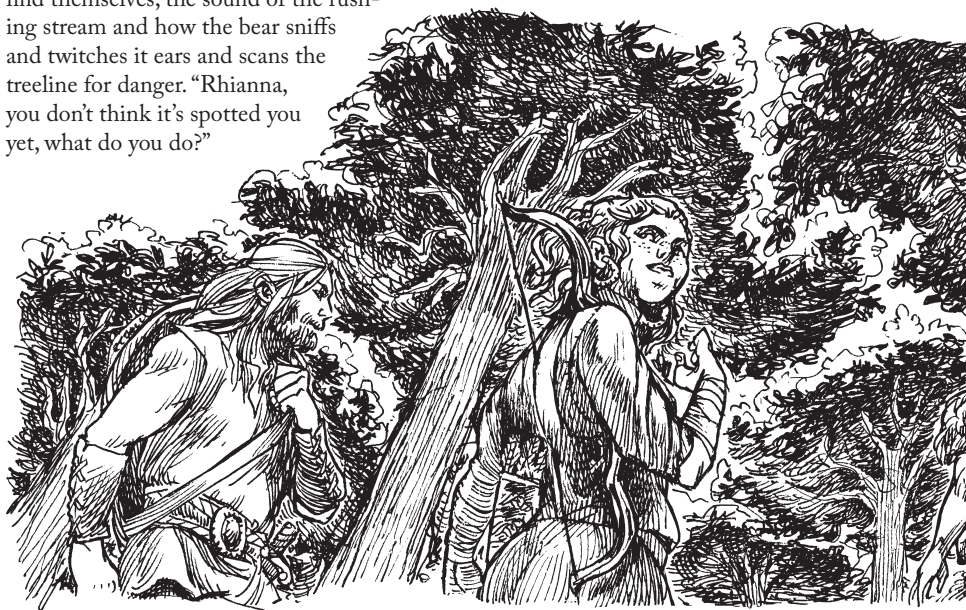
Scenes are zoomed-in. They feature specific characters in a particular place at a particular time. You follow the action moment-to-moment. Details are plentiful and specific. Players speak in character, and you portray NPCs in-character as well. Even if you and the players don't actually speak in your characters' voices, you still talk about the conversation at a zoomed-in, detailed level.

During a scene, you might describe the clearing in the woods where the PCs find themselves, the sound of the rushing stream and how the bear sniffs and twitches its ears and scans the treeline for danger. "Rhianna, you don't think it's spotted you yet, what do you do?"

Scenes are cinematic and immersive, sometimes tense, often exciting. Players might lose themselves in their characters and feel real emotions about what's happening.

Good scenes have a purpose. There's a reason you framed this scene with these characters in this place, right? What are the PCs trying to accomplish? What are you trying to convey? What question are you hoping to answer? What conflict is being resolved? Knowing the purpose of a scene helps you focus your details, descriptions, and GM moves. And if you can't identify a scene's purpose, then maybe you don't need the scene!

When the scene's purpose is addressed, or the scene fizzles out, then wrap it up. Transition into the next obvious scene ("You enter the next room and see...") or shift into loose play.



Loose play is what happens between scenes. You still follow the core loop, but it's zoomed out. Instead of describing what happens here and now, you'll talk about what happens over minutes, hours, days, or weeks. You summarize and compress, skip minutiae and gloss over stretches of time. You do more *talking about* the characters than *portraying* the characters.

During loose play, you might describe the PCs moving through the Great Wood, the quiet tension as they try to avoid notice, the heat and biting insects getting worse as the day goes on. You might ask questions like “Caradoc, what does your mind keep wandering to?” or “Rhianna, how long to you plan on going before making camp?”

Player moves still work during loose play, but on a zoomed-out scale. They might Struggle as One to reach home before nightfall, or Seek Insight by watching the newcomers over the course of a few days.

Time tends to be fluid during loose play. “Okay, y’all head out and by noon you’ve reached the crossroads.” “Oh, hey. Before we left, can we say that I Traded & Bartered for some bendis root?” Sure we can.

Loose play is more relaxed, less intense.

Take care of bookkeeping and logistics between scenes. Check your notes, make updates, and maybe roll up some random loot (page **XX**). **Have meta-discussions.** Talk about the characters’ plans and goals (“What are we trying to accomplish again?”) See if the players have any requests (“I’d like to have a scene with Andras”). **Take breaks,** talk about real-life stuff, and enjoy each other’s company.

A lot of in-fiction time passes during loose play, especially while the players travel or spend time at home between adventures. But you want the bulk of the real-world time to be in scenes. Scene-based play is much more visceral, rich, and exciting. **Push loose play towards scenes.** As soon as the next scene suggests itself, frame it and zoom back in on detailed, moment-to-moment play.





Your GM moves

When it's time to make a GM move and you're not sure what to say, pick one of these and do it. **These are your basic GM moves:**

- Announce trouble (future or offscreen)
- Reveal an unwelcome truth
- Ask a provocative question
- Put someone in a spot
- Use up their resources
- Turn their move back on them
- Demonstrate a downside
- Hurt someone
- Separate them
- Capture someone
- Offer an opportunity (with or without a cost)
- Tell them the consequences/requirements (then ask)
- Advance a countdown/grim portent

These aren't technical terms. When you **reveal an unwelcome truth**, you just *do that*. You establish something in the fiction that the characters wish wasn't true. When you **hurt someone**, you say how someone gets hurt.

Your GM moves should inspire and empower you; they shouldn't constrain you. Use them when you're unsure of what to do, or when you're in a rut and want to change things up. Don't stress yourself making sure that every move you make matches something from this list.

Making Your Move

Whenever the situation is clear and **you want to push the action along**, make a soft move. Say something that prompts the PCs to act and/or increases the tension. Make soft moves all the time, as part of the core loop of the game.

When the PCs **ignore trouble** that you've previously established, or when they **roll a 6- on a player move**, then make a hard GM move. Establish badness. Make something happen that the PCs don't want, or make something that the PCs want no longer possible.

You can also make a GM move **when a player's move prompts you to add something to the fiction**. For example, when they Defy Danger and roll a 7-9, you're told to present a lesser success, a cost, or a consequence. You might **use up their resources** as a cost ("You can do it, but you'll have to drop your supplies.") or **put them in a spot** as a consequence ("You make it, but the ground shifts as you land and starts to give way."), or **demonstrate a downside** as a lesser success ("You get clear, but Andras is still limping and falls behind, the creature's closing in!").

Always **make a move that follows from the established situation and/or your prep**. If they're tracking crinwin through the woods and they roll a 6-, it'd be a perfectly fine move to reveal that they're lost. But it'd be weird and uncool to say "Rocks fall out of the sky and smash you, everyone take 1d10 damage!"

Along the same lines, **your moves should reflect the specifics of the situation**.

Say that a PC faces a charging aurochs, triggers Clash, and rolls a 6-. If the PC is a mighty-thewed Heavy who braced his spear against the charge, then your hard move would look very different than if PC was a willowy Fox who tried to dodge the charge and stab it like a matador.

Don't say the name of your move, just say what happens in the fiction. Don't say "You rolled a 4 so I'm separating you." Say "Rhianna, you wake up and realize that Caradoc's not on watch. He's doesn't come back anytime soon. His blanket is discarded by the edge of the firelight."

Other GM moves

You have other lists of GM moves available to you, too.

Use your **exploration moves** when the PCs are on an expedition or exploring a location (see pages **XX** and **XX**).

Use **threat moves** to bring a threat or its influence into a scene, or when it's already involved (see page **XX**).

Use **homefront** moves when the PCs are at home or spending time in another stading, to make interesting stuff happen there (see page **XX**).

Use moves specific to a **location** (page **XX**), a **danger** (page **XX**), or an **NPC** (page **XX**) when those elements are in play.

Running Stonetop

Examples of GM moves

Announce trouble (future or offscreen)

This is one of your most versatile moves. Trouble almost always provokes a reaction, or at least gets folks worrying and cranks up the tension.

As a hard move, you can turn a previously peaceful scene into a fight or conflict, or maybe make it clear that the PCs' actions will have consequences later.

"WHOOOMP WHOOOMP WHOOOMP!"

Rbianna, there's a banging at your door, waking you up from that much-needed sleep. Lowri's calling your name and you hear the watch-bells clanging. What do you do?"

—
"As Caradoc and Blodwen leave, this nasty piece of work watches them go. He's got a face full of scars, a cruel sneer, and a knife at his hip. He nudges the guy next to him, nods at the door, and they get up and go. What do you do?"

—
"Glenys gives you hard stare for a few moments, then she's like, 'FINE.' And she huffs and stomps off. She's out of your hair for now, but you just know that you're going to have to deal with that later."

Reveal an unwelcome truth

Establish something as true, something that they really wish wasn't. Maybe it was true all along but you're just revealing it now. Or maybe (especially as a hard move) you're deciding right now that this bad thing is true and letting them know. Both ways work.

This is a great move to use when they Know Things or Seek Insight. On a 7+, you owe them honest answers or interesting (maybe useful) information, but there's no reason they have to be happy about what they learn. And on a 6-, you can really twist the screws.

"Vvvasil? Heavvvvens, no. Vvvassil leffft town thbbhis past autumn. Back down to Lygos, I heard." He smiles, and it's like he has too many teeth. "But ssssurely we can make some sort offff... arrangement?"

—
"What happened here recently? Well, there's like a dozen sets of prints in the mud, all churned up like there was a fight. A few splashes of blood, too, on the foliage. It's pretty clear Lowri got jumped by the crinwin."

—
"Oof, a 6-? Well, you search the hills for the rest of the day and... I guess you don't find her? No, wait. You know what? You do find Mari. Maybe half a mile from the logging camp, you find her body. Something stabbed her, impaled her right through the gut."



Ask a provocative question

Ask a question that spurs a decision or response, even if it's just an emotional response or a decision not to act. You can ask the question yourself or put it in the mouth of one of your NPCs. Alternately: ask a question that asserts badness but that gives the player a chance to author it.

"Rhianna, Eira's looking grim, and she's like: 'Garet's losing a lot of blood. I don't think he's gonna make it, and he's gonna slow us down something frightful. You want me to do the necessary?'"

"Caradoc, you come in at the very end of all this, I think. You saw that cloud of smoke billowing out of Vahid's mouth. And there's Vahid, just acting totally normal about everything. What's going through your head right now?"

"Oof, a 4? Well, I think you manage to offend her, like really hurt her feelings. What do you say or do that does that?"

Put someone in a spot

This is a more aggressive version of **announcing trouble**—they've got to do something, now, or it'll get ugly.

"Someone" can be a PC or an NPC, and you can play with the spotlight. Maybe the person you put in the spot isn't the one does something about it.

"So close! You make the jump, but smack into the bough. You slip, just barely grabbing on. You're hanging from that bough like this, gasping for air, like 80 feet up, and your grip starting to go. What do you do?"

"The big guy stands and glares down at you. 'What'd you call me, you skinny little rat?' Rhianna, you see this happen and notice like three other guys, burly miner types, standing up too, not a smile among them. What do you do?"

"So, it's like you said, the drake calms as you place your hand on its snout, and it's like a mewling kitten. But Caradoc, you're watching from the brush, and as Blodwen's calming that one, you spy another drake, behind her to her right, slinking up. It's about to pounce on her, you're sure of it, what do you do?"

Running Stonetop

Use up their resources

Something happens that whittles away at their stuff, or that takes it away from them entirely. “Resources” here can be...

- ... **concrete and specific** (their shield, their torch, their lamp oil);
- ... **concrete but abstract** (supplies, ammo);
- ... **intangible** (their reputation, someone’s trust); and/or
- ... **entirely mechanical abstractions** (HP, Fortunes, Loyalty, etc.).

When they lose something abstract, intangible, or purely mechanical, you should always bring that back to the fiction and show how it manifests. “He glares a little, then shakes his head, disillusioned. If he held any Loyalty, he’s got 1 less now.”

As a soft move, use this move to ratchet up the tension. Those 4 HP might not mean much now, but after a couple more blows the player is going to start getting *nervous*.

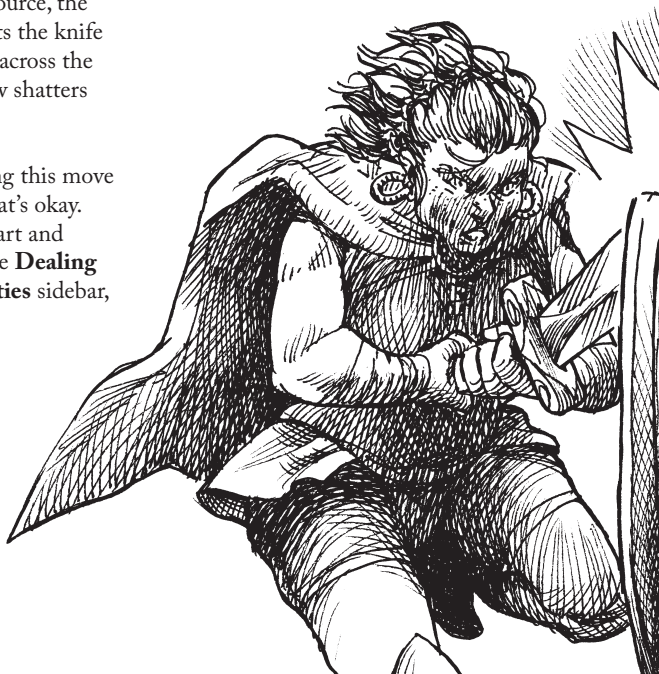
When you use up a specific resource, the loss can be temporary (“he swats the knife out of your hand, it goes flying across the room”) or permanent (“the blow shatters your shield”).

You’ll often find yourself making this move along with other moves, and that’s okay. HP, in particular, get used up part and parcel with other moves (see the **Dealing Damage and Inflicting Debilities** sidebar, page XX.)

“It’s been like an hour since you came down here. I think your torch is getting low. Like, maybe you’ve got 10 minutes of light left? What do you do?”

“Yeah, so your grip slips and down you tumble, smacking against branches all the way, WAM WACK WHOOMP. You land flat on your back, and you’re pretty sure you felt something break in your pack. Lose 2 uses of supplies and take 1d6 of damage, ignoring armor. What do you do?”

“Yup, he was totally standing right behind you as you said that last bit. You look back and he’s just beet red, on the verge of crying or yelling, you’re not sure. But he just turns and stomps off into the fields. I think he just lost any Loyalty he was holding. What do you do?”



Demonstrate a downside

Show the limits of their moves, or the baggage that comes with being (e.g.) the Heavy. Show them just how a *crude* weapon fares against an iron sword or shield. Show them why wearing *warm* armor in the blazing sun is a bad idea. Show them why it's hard to be short, or tall, or young, or old, or whatever.

"Caradoc, Rhianna, as you're watching the crinwin from the brush, you hear this, ka-chunk ka-chunk ka-chunk. Vahid's pack, for sure, and the crinwin hear it too. What do you do?"

"Caradoc, the second time you try to interject, Brennan's like 'Grown-ups are talking, boy.' And he turns back to Rhianna. 'Now, you were saying...?'"

"Your spear jabs in, and the aurochs bellows, but then it rears and twists and the spear's shaft snaps off. You're left holding half of a stick."

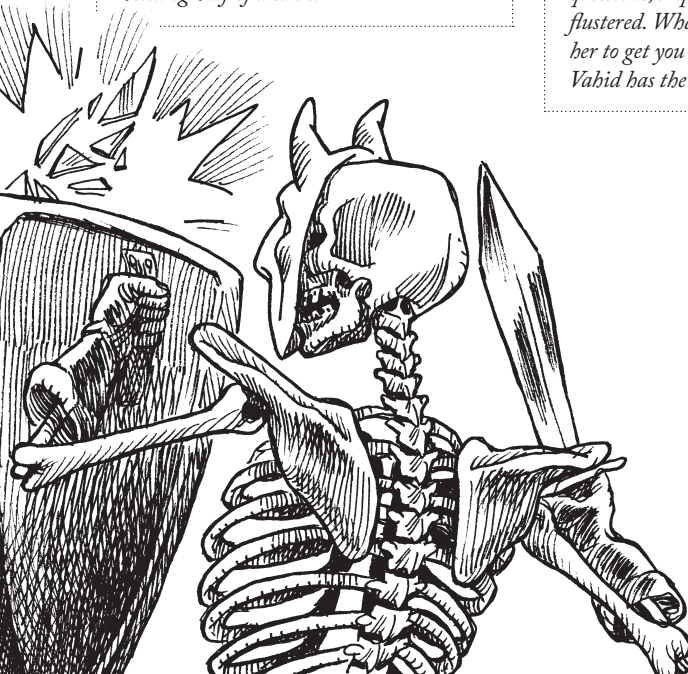
Turn their move back on them

This is a good one to use on a 6-. Take the move they were making, and flip it somehow. Maybe you give the advantage to their foes, maybe you have them come up with something bad for you to work with, maybe their move constrains their options instead of expanding them. Get creative.

"Oh, I think you know all about this evil quicksilver, Vahid. Why don't you tell us about the horrible encounter you had with it back down south, and how it's left you shaken to this day."

"A miss, huh? Tell you what, ask one of the Seek Insight questions anyhow, but you'll have disadvantage to do anything BUT act on the answer."

"Yeah, she's just not buying it. There's no way you're going to convince her to squeal on Mutra. In fact, she starts twisting the conversation around, asking you questions, tripping you up, getting you flustered. What do you think it'd take for her to get you to spill the beans on where Vahid has the weather vane hidden?"



Running Stonetop

Hurt someone

Inflict a specific, problematic injury or wound on a PC or an NPC they care about. Something more than just losing HP. Something painful, bloody, consequential, or all three.

Using this move definitely means the victim takes damage, and against a PC it might also mean that they mark a debility. It *definitely* means that they've now got a problematic wound (see page **XX**). It's a part of the fiction, something they have to deal with and something you can use as a basis for your GM moves.

How badly you hurt them depends on the fiction, whether the harm came from a 7+ or a 6-, the damage rolled, and the tags on the damage (*messy*, *forceful*, etc.). When you hurt them because they rolled a 7-9 to Clash with a guy with a club, and they only take 2 damage, that's going to look a lot different than a 6- against a rage drake dealing 12 *messy* damage.

Feel free to describe the general nature of the wound ("He stabs you in the thigh and you feel your leg buckle."), then have the player roll damage ("Take d6+2 damage.") and modulate the injury based on the damage dealt ("3 damage? Okay, I think you drop to one knee and your leg is like on fire, but it'll still hold your weight," versus "Yikes, 8 damage? You still up? Well, your leg gives out under you and it's just gushing blood.")

As a rule, only inflict a permanent, disabling injury if you've warned them it's possible (explicitly or by telegraphing/ demonstrating the danger), and either they rolled a 6- or they knowingly ignored the danger. Don't spring that stuff on them.

For example: if you say, "that thing has 6-inch long teeth and jaws that can crush trees... if it gets you, you'll be missing bits, you sure you want to just stand there and swing at it?" and they reply "Yeah, no guts no glory!" and then roll a 7-9 to Clash... well, you warned them. Say goodbye to that arm and hello to a fountain of blood.

On the other hand, if you've presented this thing as a threat but not, like, an *arm-chomping-off* threat, on a 7-9 you might say "It chomps down, there's blood everywhere, and it starts to shake you around. There's this weird, calm part of your brain that's like 'Oh my arm is about to get torn off,' but the rest of you just AAAGH. Take a d10+3 damage and mark Weakened. What do you do?" Still a pretty hard move, I'd say, but one they might recover from. Taking their arm without warning? Not cool.

With that said: feel free to hurt NPCs more aggressively and brutally than you hurt the PCs. Taking a *follower's* arm (for example) is a great way to show that this thing's attacks are *messy* and terrible, raising the stakes without deprotagonizing the PCs. (Word of advice, though: don't brutalize an animal companion without warning; players get super precious with their pets.)

Once inflicted, a wound or injury is part of the fiction. It might cause the PC to Defy Danger to attempt something that wouldn't otherwise be dangerous. It might be the fictional justification for another move you make. It might prompt you to make moves that escalate the injury.

For more about HP, damage, debilities, and problematic wounds, see the **Harm and Healing** chapter (page **XX**).



Dealing damage and inflicting debilities

“Dealing damage” isn’t a GM move by itself; it’s a thing that happens as part of another GM move. When you make a move that involves a character getting banged up, hurt, knocked around, or injured, then deal damage to them as part of that move. Tell the player how much damage they take (usually a die roll, based on the monster that inflicted it or the circumstances surrounding it). They lose that many HP. If they’re reduced to 0, they’re out of the action and quite likely at Death’s Door.

Likewise, you don’t have a move for “inflict a debility.” You can inflict a debility when you **hurt someone** or **use up their resources**, when you make any other move that would result in them being Weakened, Dazed, or Miserable (“You realize that your hands are shaking, your legs wobbling... mark Weakened”).

For more on damage and debilities, see the **Harm and Healing** chapter (page **XX**).

“It like reaches out towards Eira, its hand expanding like mist and clutching her chest, and she just starts moaning and convulsing and you see bits of her skin blackening. She takes 1d12 damage, ignoring armor. Is she still up? No? Okay, well it drops her and she just slumps to the ground. What do you do?”

“It just SQUEEZES and you can’t breathe, can’t move, then SNAP you feel a rib go and HOLY CRAP this hurts. Take a d8+3 damage, ignoring armor, and mark Weakened. Vabid, you finish lighting the naphtha as this happens, see Caradoc turning blue in its coils. What do you do?”

“Oh dear. 9 damage? And you’re still up? Yeah, um... I think as you try to wrench your arm free, it, um... crap, I think it just chomps down hard and there’s just this searing pain and you go staggering back. You’re free, but you look down and your right arm is just gone. Blood is spurting, you feel cold, and you think you might faint. What do you do?”

Running Stonetop

Separate them

Split the party. Put foes or obstacles between them. Have someone fall behind. Have a follower or other NPC go missing. Send someone tumbling down the slope, taking them out of the fight. That sort of thing.

This move often pairs well with **put them in a spot**. Because what's worse than being in a spot? Being *alone* in a spot.

"Blodwen, after maybe twenty minutes of pushing through the tall grass, you all get a little spread out and you realize you can't see anyone else. At first you can hear them so no big deal, but then the sound of them moving through the grass is lost in the constant wind. What do you do?"

"Oof. Yeah, as you give her your spiel she's kind of stone faced, no response. Then there's this pause, and she sorta gasps and sobs and then come the waterworks. 'Dammit, Caradoc.' And she turns and slams the door and you can hear her weeping. What do you do?"

"Okay, cool, so Vahid you're a bit further down the hall, right? With Lowri holding the lantern for you? Well, as you start to make out the runes—something about 'portal' or 'doorway' or maybe 'road'—there's this CUH-CLUNK that you feel in your chest, everyone does, and then a screeching metal-on-metal sound and this steel curtain drops from the ceiling, cutting off the hallway. BOOM. Vahid, you and Lowri are on the far side of it, by yourselves, dust billowing all over. What do you do?"

Capture someone

On a soft version of this move, capture them but stay in the scene, giving them a chance to escape (or others a chance to rescue them). On a hard version, maybe cut straight to the next scene—captured, bound, dragged off who knows where—and just gloss over the details of how they got there.

"Brennan whistles and Ragan, calm and quick as anything, he just grabs Blodwen and spins her around, knife to her throat. Brennan sighs, steps back behind them. 'I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this, but you don't leave me much choice. We'll be going, and I'm sure the young lass here would appreciate it if you all kept your hands where I can see them.' They start backing away, what do you do?"

"Caradoc, you touch the sphere it's like WHOOSH. You're floating in space, looking down over your body. The world is gray and hazy and washed out, and you can't really feel your feet. Vahid, you come home a couple hours later and find Caradoc just slumped over the ice-sphere, his fingers touching it and all blue. He's not responding. What do you do?"

"Yeah, Vahid, Lowri is like waving the torch around in the dark and you're both peering out, looking for whatever made that noise, and we the audience see this shadowy form loom up behind you with these long, spindly fingers. Those fingers clamp down over your mouth, Vahid, and another shape grabs Lowri. There's a brief struggle and then the camera like pans down to the lantern on the floor, on its side, cracked and flickering. We hear sounds of you two getting dragged away. Rhianna, while this is happening..."

Offer an opportunity (with or without a cost)

Give them an opening, a chance to act. The opportunity can be specific (“If you act now, you’ll have the drop on them.”) or general (“They don’t seem to have spotted you, what do you do?”). It can come with a definite cost (“...but it’ll make a bunch of noise and raise the alarm.”) or a potential cost (“...but you’ll have to hurry to make it in time”) or no cost at all.

You’ll often make this move without realizing it. When you just hand a player the initiative—when there’s a tense, active situation and you ask “What do you do?” without first **announcing trouble** or **putting them in a spot** or otherwise making them react—you’re offering them an opportunity.

“3 damage? With his armor, that’s not enough to drop him. I think he jerks back and you just like score a slice down his cheek. But he’s on his heels, what do you do?”

“They’re not taking the bait, Rhianna. But you if you made a show of heading out of camp and leaving Andras and Blodwen there alone? That’d do it. What do you do?”

“What here is useful or valuable to you? That glowing blue crystal set in the wall. If you smash it, it’ll unleash all sorts of chaos, just the distraction you need.”

Tell them the consequences/ requirements (then ask)

Use this move as an interrupt, as a way to clarify the fiction and set the stakes when they say they want to do a thing. “If you do that, you realize that ___, right?”

Use this move, also, to give them a path forward when the way is otherwise blocked. Use it to force a meaningful decision. Use it to make them pay (in time, resources, opportunity, etc.) if they want to follow a course of action.

“What about Gareth’s body, Rhianna? If you leave it, the rest of the crew is going grumble—you know how superstitious they are. You could burn it, but that’ll take time and give away your position. What do you do?”

“If you do that, cool, but you won’t have a chance to get clear. You’ll be caught in the blast for sure. You do it?”

“Yeah, no. Your hands are shaking, your mouth is dry, you can’t think about anything but that baleful, hateful eye. You want to take a shot, you’re going to have to get it together first. What do you do?”

“Vahid, you can’t make heads or tails of these runes, not right now at least. Maybe if you took a rubbing and had time to study them back home, with all your books and notes and everything. But not out here. What do you do?”

“That thing is made of solid stone. Your arrows aren’t going to do squat, Rhianna. You want to hurt this thing, or even slow it down, you’re going to need to hit it with something big and heavy.”

Running Stonetop

Advance towards impending doom **Threats** (page **XX**) and **hazards** (page **XX**) might have impending dooms, each with a series of grim portents leading up to them. When you make this move, you decide that one of those grim portents has come to pass, and show it to the characters.

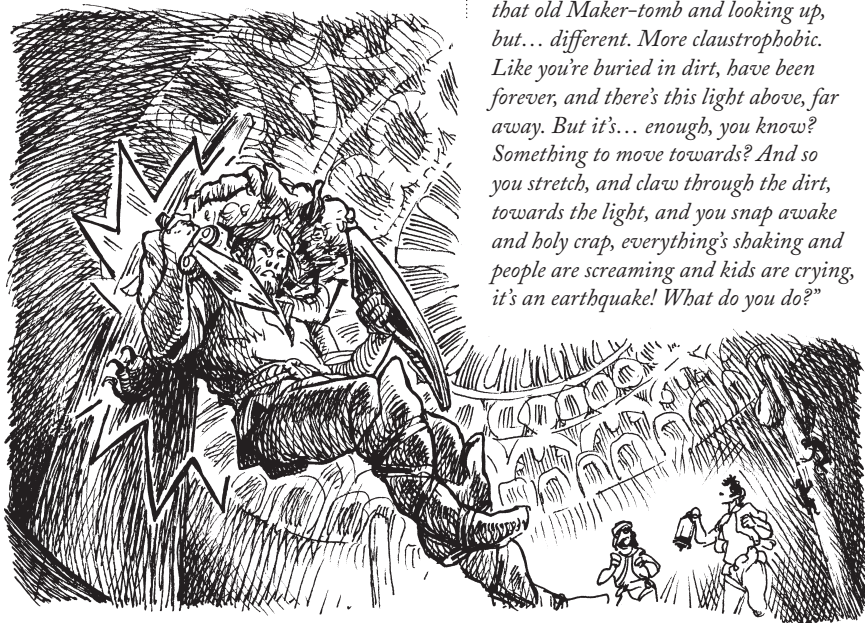
In practice, this move almost always manifests as another move. You **announce trouble** or **reveal an unwelcome truth** or **put someone in a spot** (etc.) in a way that demonstrates that the grim portent has come to pass.

Rarely, you might chuckle evilly and tick a box, and say that they've got a bad feeling or that a cold wind blows, without actually revealing the portent just yet. When you do this, be sure to commit to the portent having come to pass offscreen. If you don't, you haven't really made a move at all.

"You find Nia in that collapsed house on the edge of town. You've got to squeeze in there, and your eyes have to adjust to the dark, but when they do, your stomach drops. There're chalk drawings of spiders all over the walls, and... an altar? With this mass of sticks, fur, and web that you realize is an idol of a big spider. Nia's all smiling and like 'Hi Blodwen, do you like my drawings?' What do you do?"

"So, you're stabbing at it over your shoulder, but stumbling around as you do. And I think, yeah, you kill it, but you end up staggering back into one of the old columns. There's this loud CRACK and some creaking and dust starts to pour down from the ceiling. Vahid, you see this happen, what do you do?"

"Caradoc, as you drift off to sleep, you find yourself dreaming. A really weird, vivid dream. It's like when you were in that old Maker-tomb and looking up, but... different. More claustrophobic. Like you're buried in dirt, have been forever, and there's this light above, far away. But it's... enough, you know? Something to move towards? And so you stretch, and claw through the dirt, towards the light, and you snap awake and holy crap, everything's shaking and people are screaming and kids are crying, it's an earthquake! What do you do?"



An example of play

Everyone's arrived. We've chatted, gotten comfortable, and we're ready to get started. The session starts in **loose play**. I ask if anyone wants to recap. Rhianna's player does.

"We sent a logging crew to the Foothills. But some sort of goat-demon spooked them, and it—or something—wounded Andras. They sent him back. We've gone up to investigate. Did we get anything useful out of Andras before we left?"

Blodwen says "He was pretty out of it. We got him stable, but he kept moaning 'that eye!' And I think he made a pass at me."

"Right, right! You'd already outfitted and started up to the Foothills," I say.

I ask some questions to help us warm up. "But before we start—Caradoc, who do you think gave you guff about going on yet another adventure? And Vahid, why are you so happy to get out of town for a bit?"

We learn how Sawyl the Tanner's been looking for a new apprentice and how Caradoc feels all sorts of guilty about it. We also learn that Vahid needs a break from the widow Maire, who's been cramping his "confirmed bachelor" style. I take some notes!

Okay, let's do this. I frame the action and then describe the environment. "The four of you enter the Foothills in the afternoon of the second day out. The hills rise out of the Flats, and the road winds between them. Young, thin trees dot the slopes, getting bigger and older as you press further into the hills. As the sun dips low, you finally get some blessed shade." (Some of those details are from the almanac; the rest I made up).

It's the first time we've seen the Foothills in-game, so I ask questions like "What striking difference do you notice between these hills and the Great Wood?"

After they answer my questions, I zoom in and frame an actual scene, giving details and specifics. "You reach the camp just after sunset. It's on the wayside, but even so, they've set up felled logs like a barricade. They're all huddled round a feeble cooking fire. Everyone's quiet, tense, gripping hatchets. They spook a bit when you show up, but when they realize that it's you four, there's a murmur of relief. 'It's Rhianna,' and 'the Blessed,' and 'Thank Tor.'" (Notice how I'm focusing on feelings and behaviors more than the tactical layout, because those are the details that matter. I'm also portraying my NPCs.) "Hey, Rhianna, who'd you put in charge?" (Asking more questions!)

"Hub. Elios, I guess."

I make my soft move and ask a provocative question. "Cool. He's like, 'You didn't bring the wagon. So we're done? We can go home?' Others nod, hopeful. What do you do?"

Rhianna asks me, player-to-GM, "Wait, hold up. Is my crew here?" I answer her question, tell her that they aren't, then ask her again what she does.

Rhianna replies (in that stern voice of hers), "Where's my crew at, Elios?" Time to resolve her action. She's pressing Elios (Persuade, maybe?) but there's no reason for him to resist and so the move doesn't trigger. I just say what happens and reply in Elios's voice. "They're still out. Hunting."

(continued on next page)

Running Stonetop

(continued from previous page)

*The situation's clear but could use a nudge, so I keep talking as Elios and make another soft move (**announce trouble**). "You know, they should've been back by now. What do you do?"*

*The PCs discuss searching for the crew, but opt to stay put and get more info. They still aren't triggering any moves (they're asking questions that the loggers would willingly answer) so I just **portray my NPC**. Elios and Terrwyn say how they both saw the demon a week ago, before Andras was attacked. "Like a big goat, with a human skull, three eyes, and a huge horn."*

*I was going to **offer an opportunity** but Vahid jumps in. "Have I ever heard of something like this?" That triggers Know Things, so he rolls +INT and gets an 8.*

*I know from my prep that this demon-goat is actually a guardian spirit, and that the real threat is a hagr, so I use one of my exploration moves and **hint at more than meets the eye**. "Sounds like a shaksa, a spirit or demon the folks up north believe in. Like a guardian of graveyards? Or maybe that's a metaphor and it's like the lord of the charnal grounds? How do you know this?"*

"Oh, from a religious text of theirs, I read it in a library down south. I'll keep it to myself for now."

*I update the situation. "It's full night now and the crew still isn't back." I focus the spotlight and **offer an opportunity**. "Hey, Caradoc, while they talked to Elios and Terrwyn, you noticed some glances between the others. Like, they're scared. But maybe hiding something, too? What do you do?"*

"Ooh, I watch carefully and try to figure out what's up. Seek Insight?" It is, but he rolls a 4. Time for a hard move!

*I **announce trouble**. "You're sure that Ixwan and Mari know more than they're saying, but before you can act on that, there's this horrible roar and crashing sound from up in the hills, then smaller shouts—like people fighting. You all hear it. What do you do?"*

They ask questions and I clarify the situation a bit (it's dark, the fight sounds pretty close, none of them know these hills well). Then Rhianna says "Let's go. Into the hills."

That ends the scene! There's a bit of loose play as we talk logistics. Vahid and Blodwen each bring a torch, lit from the cooking fire. "You head out?" I ask. They do.

*I zoom out and describe the situation in general. "It's dark, the hills are steep and wooded, and you're navigating by sound, following the sounds of battle." I make my soft move and **tell them the requirements**. "If you're trying to get there quickly, that'll trigger Struggle as One—the danger being that you get lost or separated or hurt on the way. If you take your time and move carefully, you won't trigger a move—but you probably won't get there in time to help with the fight. What do you do?"*

They decide to Struggle as One. We resolve the move and they each roll well, and so we transition to next scene. "It's a desperate, half-blind run through the woods, but then you pop out into a clearing. In your flickering torch light, you see Eira and Lowri facing off against this huge, hulking brute, like 12 feet tall and half as wide."

*I barely take a breath before making my soft move (**put someone in a spot**): “It boists a small tree like a club and roars, about to smash them both, and they’re both just staring at this thing, gaping.” I’ve been addressing the group, the spotlight unfocused, so now I tighten it up. “Rhianna, Blodwen, you got here first—what do you do?”*

Rhianna’s player doesn’t hesitate. “I shoot it. In the head. Let Fly?” Yes, but I tell her to wait until we see what Blodwen’s doing.

Blodwen asks questions. “So this is like a person? Just really big?” Yup. “And it hasn’t noticed us? Yup, for now, they just got there. “Do I recognize it? Like is it maybe one of our loggers, mutated or something?”

“Eh,” I tell her. “I doubt you could tell at a quick glance in torchlight. You could take a moment and Seek Insight. Do you?”

“No. Could I like yell and wave the torch and distract it?” she asks. Caradoc’s player notes that this sounds like the trigger for Defend (“jump in to protect others”) and we all agree. But we also agree that Rhianna would get her shot off before that happens.

Rhianna gets an 8 to Let Fly, and chooses to put herself in danger to get the shot. She only does 3 damage, less 1 armor. It’s barely hurt, and I need to put Rhianna in danger.

“I think you’ve got to step into the clearing to get the shot, yeah? You clip it in the shoulder, and—good news—it checks its swing, snarls and turns your way, leaves Eira and Lowri alone. Bad news, though, is that it fixes you with its big, bulging, horrible eye and your mind just goes blank, your knees start to wobble, you can’t even think.”

That resolves Rhianna’s move, so I shift the spotlight and offer an opportunity. “Blodwen, do you still want to Defend?”

She does, and rolls a 9. She immediately spends her Readiness to draw all attention from her ward (Rhianna, now) to herself. “Cool, what does this look like?” I ask.

“I step in front of Rhianna, waving my torch and yelling, like ‘YAAAAAA!’”

It works, of course. I say how the hagr turns its eye on her, filling her with that same feeling of dread that Rhianna had.

I shift the spotlight to Caradoc and Vahid. I tell them that they just arrived, quickly recap the situation, then offer an opportunity. “It’s focused on Blodwen right now, what do you do?”

Vahid takes the situation in by Seeking Insight. We decide to resolve that later, because Caradoc rushes in, shield up and spear stabbing low. Blodwen had its attention, so we agree that Caradoc can get close enough to attack, but it’s still very able and willing to fight back. This triggers Clash, but Caradoc gets a 4.

I need to make a hard move, and the obvious thing is to hurt him. “I guess it sees you coming, Caradoc, and swings that tree branch before you can close. you get smacked in the head and everything’s just white and your ears are ringing and what is even going on? Take a d10+3 damage and mark Dazed. Rhianna, you snap out of it and see it club Caradoc in the head, he just went flying and landed in a heap. What do you do?”

And we go from there.

Your principles

These principles are your guidelines, your best practices, your rules of behavior for running *Stonetop*. Strive to follow them. They are the surest way to achieve your agenda.

- ⊙ Follow the rules
- ⊙ Begin and end with the fiction
- ⊙ Address the characters, not the players
- ⊙ Ask questions and build on the answers
- ⊙ Be a fan of the player characters
- ⊙ Embrace the fantastic and the mundane
- ⊙ Exploit the setting guide
- ⊙ Respect your prep
- ⊙ Bring your characters to life
- ⊙ Think offscreen, too
- ⊙ Bring it home
- ⊙ Let things breathe
- ⊙ Let things burn

Following your principles isn't always easy. Sometimes it's unclear what a given principle looks like in the moment. Sometimes, the principles will conflict. A big part of your job is to interpret these principles and apply them as you think best. You'll often do this instinctively, and how exactly you follow your principles is a big part of your own personal style of GMing.

Follow the rules

There are many rules, especially in the form of player moves: basic moves and follower moves, special moves, exploration moves, and steading moves. Each playbook has moves. Inserts have moves. Arcana have moves. Dangers, discoveries, threats, and locations can all have player-facing moves.

Hopefully this is obvious, but: **when a move is triggered, follow the procedures in the move and say what the move requires of you.** The rules are there to push the conversation and the fiction in certain directions, and to clarify what happens in moments of uncertainty.

Give the players the full benefits of their moves and their rolls. Challenge their ability to trigger those moves, sure, and temper the results based on the established fiction and your prep. But don't fudge the results of a move because you think things should go a particular way, or because you're worried that things will be "too easy" or "too hard." That's not your job. You're **playing to find out what happens**, right?

You don't get to invoke a player move unless its trigger is actually met. You *don't* get to say, "The crinwin attacks you, roll +DEX to Defy Danger!" Gods, no. You say that the crinwin leaps at them and ask, "What do you do?" If they do something that triggers a move, *then* you do *that*.

It's okay if, in service of your other principles, you suggest something in the spirit of the rules instead of following their exact letter, but be up front about it and get consent. "You got a 7-9 to Clash? Roll your damage. 9!?! Yikes. So, I know it says you expose yourself to your enemy's attack but I'm thinking the 'attack' in this case is that your axe gets wedged into his skull and it's gonna take a bit to get it free. That okay with you?"

Begin and end with the fiction

Remember: "the fiction" is the shared, imagined space that you and the players establish through conversation, and the various characters' actions and relative positions within that imaginary space.

When rules are invoked—when a player triggers a move or rolls damage or spends a resource or whatever—ground the rules in the fiction. If you can't picture what the character is actually doing or how they're doing it, then ask questions and clarify the fiction before going to the dice. After the dice are rolled, and the rules say what happens, describe what that looks like in the fiction (or ask the player to). **Fiction, then rules, then back to fiction.** Always.

Likewise, when you make a GM move, make a move that flows from the fiction as established. Don't say the name of the move—keep that to yourself—but describe how it manifests in the fiction. Show, don't tell.

Beginning and ending with the fiction is a crucial part of **portraying a rich and mysterious world**. If you skimp on the fiction and just focus on the mechanics, you'll find that your world is bland, boring, and anemic.

Bad: "You attack the hagr? Cool, roll to Clash. A 10? Do you evade its attack or deal extra damage? Okay, roll your damage +1d6. 7 damage? It's still up and hits you back for 1d10+3 forceful, knocking you down. It's coming at you again, what do you do?"

Good: "You attack the hagr? Cool, what's that look like? Stabbing up into its gut? Yeah, sure, roll Clash. A 10? Do you evade its attack or deal extra damage? Okay, roll your damage +1d6. 7 damage? So like you said, you stab it in its gut and the hagr doubles over, howling in pain, but before you can get away it just uncoils and backhands you across the face. Take d10+3 damage as you go flying and land in a heap, head spinning. You hear it lumbering towards you, grunting in pain and anger. What do you do?"

Address the characters, not the players

Ask the *characters* what they do. Tell the *characters* what they see and hear. Tell the *characters* what's obvious to them. Don't say, "Brian, what is Vahid doing to keep awake?" Say instead: "Vahid, what are you doing to keep awake?" Don't tell Jamie, "Rhianna can tell that he's lying." Say (in Iwan's whiny voice) "No way, Rhianna, you know I'd never do that," and then (in your own voice), "But he looks away and you can just tell he's full of crap."

By speaking this way, you keep the game focused on the fiction. You push the players to think, speak, and respond as their characters. You establish fiction as the characters perceive it, because that's who you're addressing.

Running Stonetop

Ask questions and build on the answers

Ask questions all the time, all over the place.

Ask questions **to establish intent**. “Before you all head out in the morning, is there anything else anyone wants to do?”

Ask questions **to clarify intent** and get yourself on the same page as the players. “Yeah, I guess you can get around him. But what are you hoping to accomplish here?”

Ask questions **to clarify the fiction**. “Sure, you can Seek Insight. What does that look like?”

Ask the characters **what they’re thinking or feeling**. “Caradoc, you’re standing there, bleeding from where Wynfor stabbed you, and the look in his eye—you barely recognize him. What’s going through your head right now?”

Ask the characters **about their past or their day-to-day lives**. “Rhianna, who taught you how to hunt and track?” “Blodwen, you live with your mother, right? Any other siblings? What’s the place look like inside?”

Ask the characters **about things they would know**. “Rhianna, you’ve met Brennan before. What’s his most distinguishing feature?”

Ask the characters **about things they’ve heard or what they believe**, where their answers might not be entirely true. “Blodwen, what stories have you heard about the Quiet Twins and how they came to haunt the Stream? What do you think the truth is?”

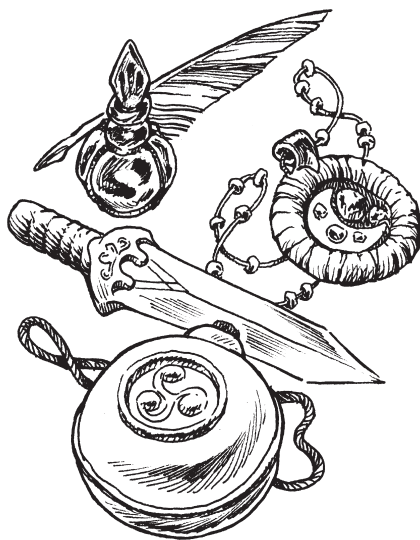
Ask questions **that assert details while asking for input**. “Vahid, what have you noticed that all the missing children have in common?” “Rhianna, what little ritual do folks always do when crossing the Stream?”

Ask the characters **to paint the scene for you**, by asking them for details on a theme. “What here tells each of you that this is a place touched by the fae?” “What do you see here that you’ve seen a thousand times before?” “What’s the most striking thing about the Flats in early spring?”

Ask questions **that do more than one of the above**. “Caradoc, when you all got back to town, whose reaction surprised you the most? How did they react, and how did you feel about it?”

Reincorporate their answers into the fiction, right away or later on. Don’t shut down their answers unless it’s to point out a contradiction. Ask follow-up questions. Think about what their answers imply and extrapolate from there. Their answers might surprise you—that’s part of the fun—but carry on as if that answer has always been a true and obvious part of the established world.

When you ask your players to contribute to the fiction, it helps you **play to find out what happens**. Your players will always come up with details that you wouldn’t, and that makes the world you’re all creating a little more surprising. When you build on the details that players have established, it helps you **portray a rich and mysterious world**. People are often more invested in things they helped create, and when you bring up a character or a detail that they introduced four sessions back, and it matters, that really brings the world to life.



Be a fan of the player characters

The PCs are the protagonists of the story. Keep the focus of the game on them. Root for them. Celebrate their victories. Lament their losses. Let yourself wonder things about them, and then find ways to get the answers through play. Care about them. Be their fans.

Being a fan of the player characters doesn't mean letting them do whatever they want. You're the author of their adversity. You need to **punctuate their lives with adventure**. Threaten them. Hurt them. Go after the things they care about. Give them all sorts of difficult choices.

But also: give them opportunities, both to shine in the moment and to make things better in the long run. Let them enjoy the things they work for.

Stonetop gives the player characters lots of agency. Respect that. Don't shortchange them out of their moves or their rolls. See what they do with their power, status, and competence. **Play to find out what happens.**

The Line

In *Stonetop* and games like it, there's a line between what the players are responsible for and what you as the GM are responsible for. The players are in charge of their characters: what they do and say; what they feel and think; how they live; their past experiences. As the GM, you're in charge of the world: the environment, the NPCs, the dangers and the discoveries.

Some of the questions described here blur the line. When you ask Vahid what the missing children all have in common, you're really asking Vahid's player to do something that's generally the responsibility of the GM: make up details about the world.

The trick is to **address the characters, not the players**. Don't ask the player to make up what they find in the next room or how an NPC reacts or how the trap hurts them. Ask the *character* about something they know, something they feel, something they have experienced. This puts the request back on their side of the line. It's a sleight of mind, but it's an effective one.

Even so, blurring the line can be uncomfortable or off-putting for some players. Some players are totally fine with making up details about the world, but others will find that it takes away from their sense of immersion or makes the world feel hollow and made up. Adjust the questions you ask, and how you ask them, to fit your and your players' preferences.

Running Stonetop

Embrace the fantastic and the mundane

The world is filled with fantastic elements: spirits, monsters, fickle fae, the ancient works of the Makers, the darkness of the Things Below. Play up these elements. Use them to make the world mysterious.

But at the same time, ground the game in human concerns: the turn of seasons, the coming harvest, friends and neighbors. Threaten the PCs with real-world dangers: harsh weather, wild beasts, starvation, exposure. Ask about the provisions they brought or how they got that cloak. Make the world rich with mundane detail.

Contrast the fantastic and the mundane against each other. If an adventure revolves around a supernatural threat or opportunity, then be sure to include perfectly mundane challenges, dangers, and discoveries. If a session involves mostly mundane concerns (like a trade mission to Marshedge or an aurochs hunt), sprinkle in some fantastic elements. The interplay between the two makes the world that much richer and more mysterious.

Exploit the setting guide

Stonetop comes with a lot of established setting, but it leaves a lot of blanks for you and your players to fill in during play. The setting is intended to serve as a springboard for your creativity. It helps set a tone and gives you all a common starting point. It provides details to riff on. It hints at answers but doesn't always give them. Use the established setting to **portray a rich and mysterious world**.

Use the setting guide to inspire, but don't feel beholden to it. If your players give you something that contradicts the established setting, don't negate their input just because the book says so. The book isn't the authority, it's a resource for you to exploit.

With that said: **be thoughtful about what you change or discard.** It's safer to change specific details than to change broad themes. If the Fox says that Brennan used to run a gang in Marshedge and killed his way to power (as opposed to the setting guide's story about how he was a bandit who the council hired as their marshal), then no big deal. But if you and the Seeker decide that the Makers were gnome-sized tinkers instead of inscrutable titans, then you'll need to rethink all sorts of setting details (the size of the roads, the scale of the Ruined Tower, the themes associated with each type of Maker, and so forth).

Respect your prep

Between sessions, you'll make preparations (i.e. "prep"). You'll write up threats and NPCs. You'll create or choose dangers and discoveries. You'll think of encounters and design locations to explore.

Some prep involves possibilities: things that the PCs *might* discover, dangers that they *could* face, problems that *might* arise. This sort of prep lives in a quantum state. But until you actually use these ideas and introduce them to the fiction, these ideas aren't true. They're just ideas—ideas that help you **punctuate the characters' lives with adventure**.

A lot of your prep, though, involves making decisions—real, binding decisions about how the world *is*. This includes stuff like a monster's instinct, moves, and hit points, or how a location got to be the way that it is, or who killed the widow Mari. It might include decisions about what *will* happen if the PCs don't intervene, or how an NPC would react to X or Y. This type of prep is part of the fiction already, even if you haven't yet revealed it to the players.

Make these decisions carefully and thoughtfully. Take your time. Follow the guidelines in the upcoming chapters.

Then, during play, respect your prep. Treat it as fictional truth. Describe the world, portray your characters, and make GM moves with these decisions in mind. If you've done your prep well, you'll find that sticking to it not only helps you **portray a rich and mysterious world**, it also (paradoxically) helps you **play to find out what happens**.

See page **XX** for more on prep.

Bring your characters to life

Name your NPCs. Give them distinct personalities. Wants, needs, and quirks. Opinions and beliefs. If you can manage it, portray them with distinct voices or mannerisms. Bring them to life and play them as if they were real people.

Describe your NPCs with memorable traits. Players often have a hard time remembering that the smith is named Taliesen, but they'll remember that the smith is a big loud guy with a shock of white hair.

Don't let PCs walk all over your NPCs. Be a fan of the player characters, sure, but that doesn't mean you should have your NPCs just do whatever the PCs want. If it feels like the PCs are pressuring or enticing your NPCs into doing something that they wouldn't want to do, well, that's what the Persuade move is for.

Bring your non-human characters to life, too. Describe how they look, of course, but also how they move, what they sound and smell like, how they act.

Beasts, spirits, even the utterly alien Things Below—they've all got personalities. Develop a sense of their motives and how they act under pressure. For beasts, think about their ecologies. For the undead, what keeps them from passing through the Black Gates? For magical entities, think about the strange rules they follow. For all of the above: put those details on screen, or at least hint at them. It goes a long way towards **portraying a rich and mysterious world**.

Running Stonetop

Think offscreen, too

When you establish the situation, answer questions, or make moves, think about events off-screen. What are your NPCs and monsters doing? What have they done? What traces did they leave? What have they been up to that becomes evident? What are they doing now that might become relevant later? Weave the answers into what you say.

Think, too, about what the PCs are doing and how it would shape off-screen events. If they make a lot of noise moving through the Great Wood, who hears them coming and how do they react? If they make an alliance with Gordin's Delve, how do the Hillfolk—who have a beef with the Delvers—respond? If they told the town that they'd be gone for five days and they're gone for two weeks, who assumes that they're dead? Who steps up and tries to take charge? Who takes the opportunity to do what they want?

Thinking offscreen helps you **portray a rich and mysterious world**, because the world will feel larger than the PCs. It helps you **punctuate the characters' lives with adventure**, because off-screen threats and opportunities quickly become things for the PCs to deal with. And it helps you **play to find out what happens**, because it gets you thinking about consequences and cause/effect on a broader scale.

Bring it home

Make the village of Stonetop itself the foundation of your game, the beginning and end of the PC's adventures. Threaten the town, its livelihood, or its citizens. Give them chances to make progress towards improvements, or to finally put down lingering threats.

When the PCs set off on an adventure, show how their neighbors react. Who turns out to see them off? Who is sick with worry that they won't return? Who grumbles that this is folly? Who gives them something to take, because it's dangerous to go alone?

During adventures, ask questions that tie back to the PCs' lives in Stonetop. Who taught you how to hunt? Who came here with you all those years back, and what happened to them? Which old-timer once had a run-in with these creatures? Whose life would be most changed by this treasure? Whose smile do you find yourself thinking about, out here, under the stars?

When the PCs return home, consider what has happened while they were gone and describe how the townsfolk greet them. Who is happiest? Who resents their return? Who blames them for stirring up all this trouble anyhow, never mind that they've put things right?

Between adventures, ask the characters about their day-to-day lives and relationships. Show how the town changes in response to its troubles and the opportunities the PCs have seized. Describe NPCs growing older, having children, aspiring to more, settling for less. Show how they've been affected by the PCs' adventures. Bring it home.

Let things breathe

Allow stretches of time to pass between adventures, or even between individual moves. It's a big world out there, and the PCs have mundane, daily tasks to attend to. Avoid the temptation to follow the PCs' lives from day to day, hour to hour. Have weeks or months go by with a single statement: "The next three weeks keep you all occupied with the harvest, and then..."

When a threat looms, it need not be immediate and dire. You can show signs of it stirring but keep it distant and remote. Ask the PCs what they do about it, but you can resolve their response over days or weeks. Zoom in and frame a scene only when the fiction calls for immediate, specific action; zoom back out as soon as that's over. Let the threat simmer until it boils over and becomes something the PCs have to deal with.

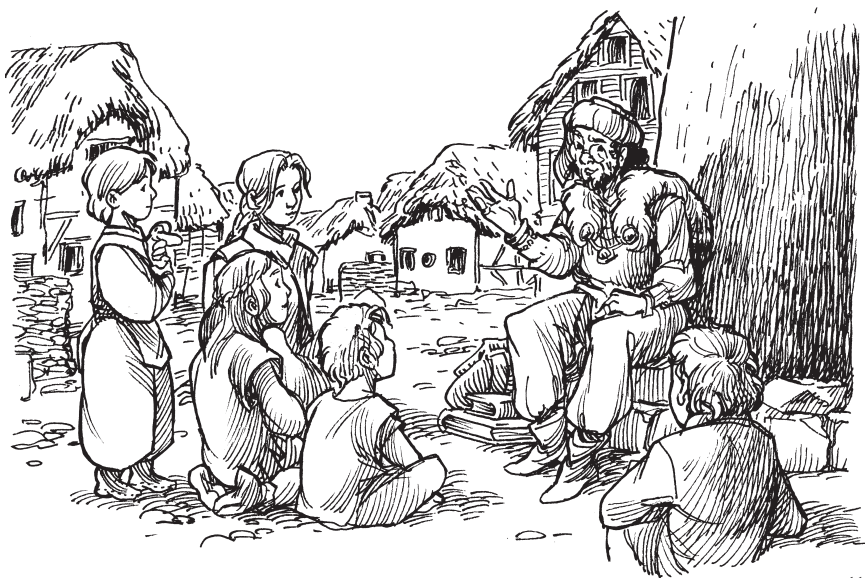
Let things burn

As much as you like your plans, as much as you come to love some of your NPCs, as much as the players will grow attached: protect no one and nothing.

Many GMs have a tendency, a very natural tendency, to coddle the PCs and to shield the NPCs that they care about. To preserve the status quo. To save their villains for a future confrontation, even when the PCs' moves and rolls and bold action should rightly put them in the ground.

That tendency? Burn it away. Then let everything else burn, too. You're not playing to preserve your darlings. You're **playing to find out what happens**.

This doesn't mean that you should go out of your way to destroy the things that the characters love. It does mean that you should threaten those things, and that if the characters fail to save them, you should follow through. Be okay with hard, irrevocable consequences. Play with fire. Let things burn.



Other things to do

Take notes. You'll end up generating lots of details, and it can be hard to keep track of it all. You'll need to figure out the best tool and the level of detail that works for you, but things you might want to write down include:

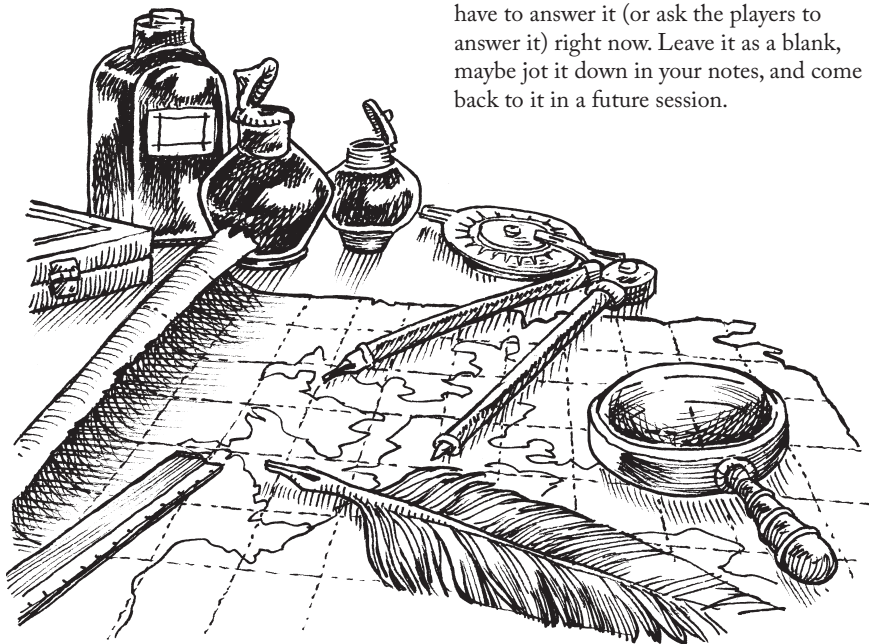
- ⊙ NPC names (and traits, and relevant relationships)
- ⊙ Historical events that you and players establish (and when/where/who)
- ⊙ Interesting details that you don't want to forget
- ⊙ A summary of events each session

You can write up formal session recaps to share with your players, but mostly these notes are for you. Write only as much as you'll find useful.

Draw maps. Lots of maps. Not just as part of your prep, but as a prop or a point of reference during play. When a fight breaks out and there's a lot going on, throw a quick sketch of the terrain on a whiteboard or a piece of paper (or throw out some minis if you have them). When they explore a ruin, draw a rough map (or encourage them to) to help establish the physical space. When they go to a new steading, give them a map of the different districts and parts of town.

Add to existing maps, too. Put the PC's homes on the steading map. Add points of interest that come up during play. Draw the course of their journey on the Vicinity or World's End maps.

Leave blanks in your maps and in your prep, to be filled in during play or at a later time. Leave yourself things to wonder about. If a question occurs to you, you don't have to answer it (or ask the players to answer it) right now. Leave it as a blank, maybe jot it down in your notes, and come back to it in a future session.



Keep things moving. Don't let the momentum of the game sputter out. Frame scenes aggressively, zooming in and out to match the level of interest (yours and the players'). When nothing's happening, either make a GM move or skip ahead in time to where something interesting *is* happening.

Involve everyone. Keep moving the spotlight around the table. Make sure everyone gets some good screen time. Don't be afraid to shut down an overly eager or aggressive player with a polite-but-firm reprimand. "Andrew, hold that thought, please—I'm talking to Jamie right now."

Take breaks. They let everyone reflect on what's happened and think about what they want to do next. They let you—the real-world people hanging out—get to know each other better or catch up on real-world stuff or just joke around. That stuff's important, too.

Engage your players in world-building, and make sure they realize the setting is theirs as much as it is yours. When they ask you something about the world, and you don't have an answer at the ready, turn it back on them. "Good question. Blodwen, what DO the people of Stonetop do with their dead?"

Sometimes, disclaim decision making. Put an outcome in the character's hands ("He's a bloody mess, but he's not dead. You can save him if you want. Do you?"). Discuss an outcome with the players ("What do you think? Is Andras alive or dead?"). Let the dice decide ("You know what, roll Death's Door for him."). Let your NPCs decide, based on their instincts, their wants and needs, your notes, and your own sense of their internal logic. ("No, he's not the type to come back as a ghost, so...



The Die of Fate

One way to disclaim decision making is to let the dice decide. Often, that means letting the results of a PC move determine what happens. But you can also use the Die of Fate.

The Die of Fate is just a die roll, usually a d6, with a lower result meaning bad and a higher result meaning good. Have a player roll the Die of Fate when you don't have a particular opinion on what should happen or how something should go, and/or when it's just a matter of luck. How's the weather today? What do they encounter en route? How many uses of supplies can they loot? In general, a 1-2 is bad, a 3-4 is neutral or mixed, and 5-6 is pretty good.

Sometimes, you'll prep a set of results for the Die of Fate. For example, what happens when they make camp?

- 1 Crinwin attack camp!
- 2-3 Crinwin try to lure someone out of camp.
- 4-5 They're out there, just watching you.
- 6 You avoid their notice.

Don't feel limited to a d6, especially not when you've got a table of results set up in advance. If you've got 12 interesting outcomes, have them roll a d12.

Running Stonetop

What not to do

Don't plan a storyline or a plot. Don't plan the PCs' character arcs. Don't plan dramatic moments, where the PCs arrive *just* as this particular thing happens (regardless of how long they took to get there or what they did before). Don't assume the PCs will take a certain course of action, or that they'll succeed or fail at a particular task. All of that flies in the face of **playing to find out what happens**. That's you deciding what will happen, in advance, by yourself. Absolutely not what you're here to do.

Instead: prep situations, and possible encounters, and places to explore. Prep threats and NPCs with good actionable instincts, maybe some grim portents and impending dooms. See the **Prep** section (page XX) for how to do this.

Don't tell them what to roll before they've told you what they're doing. You do *not* get to say crap like "the bandit attacks, Defy Danger with DEX." Because 1) That's not how it works and 2) What if they don't act quickly or with finesse (the trigger for Defying Danger with DEX)? What if they knock his attack aside and bash him with their shield? What if they grit the blow and run him through? What if they toss dirt in his eyes and kick his groin? When you tell the players to make a move, without them first telling you that they've done something to trigger the move, you're taking control of their characters and dictating what they do. You're breaking the rules of the game.

Instead: make your soft GM move and ask, "What do you do?" Then, based on the answer, decide together whether they triggered a move and which move they triggered. Then they roll that move, and you resolve it from there.

Don't make them roll just because, or because "maybe they wouldn't notice," or any of that garbage. Like, you know how in other games, you'll decide that a monster is sneaking up on camp and ask the PC for a perception check? That's not a thing in *Stonetop*.

Instead, you just make a soft GM move, like **announce trouble**, that hints at the monster's presence. "You realize that the crickets have all gone quiet. And then, maybe it's just your imagination. But you thought you heard something... laughing? Out in the woods. What do you do?" And maybe they wake the others or maybe they call out or maybe they peer carefully out into the woods and cock their head, triggering Seek Insight. However they respond, you run the game from there.

Don't stop making GM moves, especially when the players roll 10+. You'll describe what happens, yeah, and you'll give them the success that they earned. Sometimes a player will just grab the initiative and follow up (and that's cool, run with it). But usually, the players will still be looking at you to see what happens. The fiction churns along and bad guys keep doing bad things.

So when the Heavy rolls a 10+ to Clash and deals her damage and the foe's still standing and there are like two other bad-dies nearby, don't just go, "Cool, he's still standing, what do you do?"

Instead: think about how the first foe responds to getting hit, and what the other two foes are doing. Make a move that takes all that into account, and *then* ask "What do you do?"

G Ming is a practice

Running any RPG is a practice, like yoga or music or martial arts. It's not something that you master. There's always room for improvement, always something to learn.

Running *Stonetop* specifically is its own skill, its own practice. Even if you've got experience running similar games (like *Dungeon World* or *Apocalypse World*), there's a learning curve. Stonetop is easier to pick up if you've run other games, but that experience can work against you, too! You'll have to unlearn habits and adjust to new approaches, and that can be hard.

The point is: running *Stonetop* isn't exactly easy, but **you get better at it by doing it, by reflecting on how things went, and by trying to do better next time.**

During the first adventure, focus on your agenda (page XX), on following the core loop (page XX), and on recognizing the triggers of the basic player moves (page XX). Lean on your prep—that's what it's for—and take your time. Expect things to be a little rocky as you and your players learn the rules. Don't worry about punchy descriptions or voicing NPCs or sticking to every single principle.

After the first "in character" session, ask your players for feedback. What did they enjoy? What felt rocky? What do they want to see more of in future sessions? Ask for clarification if you need it, but don't get defensive and don't try to explain yourself. Try to be humble and receptive.

When you've got some time, review the session in light of your agenda. Did you **portray a rich and mysterious world**, or did the world feel flat, hollow, arbitrary? Did you **punctuate their lives with adventure**, or did you let things drag? Did you **play to find out what happens**, or did you force things down the path that you thought they should go? If you didn't pursue your agenda, ask yourself: "What would pursuing my agenda have looked like?" Next time, do *that*.

Look over your principles. Did you ever fail to follow them? How did it impact the game? What would following the principle have looked like instead?

Think about moments where you were stumped, unsure what to do. Then look at the core loop. Where were you in the loop when you got stuck? What could you have done differently? What sort of prep might have helped? Maybe prep something like that before the next session.

Review the player moves (basic, special, expedition, etc.) Did you miss any moves getting triggered? Did you call for a player move, even though its trigger wasn't really met? For moves that were used, did you follow their procedures correctly?

Next session, try to do better. Write down 2–3 things you want to do or focus on. Put them somewhere you can see them. During the session, try to do them.

Repeat the process. Ask for feedback. Review the session in light of your agenda, your principles, the rules, and the core loop. Prep to shore up your weaknesses. Set goals. Try again. Repeat.

Get good. Then get better. Then get great.

Prep

Prep is what you do between sessions, the lonely fun (or for some, the stressful work) of getting ready for the next game. Prep involves reviewing your notes from previous sessions, thinking about what might happen in the next session, and doing stuff that you don't want to do during play.



Why prep? A few reasons:

To give you **interesting stuff** to say.

To **speed up play**, and not make everyone wait while you decide what happens, or stat up a monster, or draw a map.

To **shore up your weaknesses**. If you, say, always forget about the PCs' followers and let them fade into the background, maybe prep some interesting things for those followers to say or do.

To **hone your craft**. Some stuff is better when you have time to think about it—it's more consistent or thematic, it flows better, it builds on stuff that came up earlier, etc.

To **give yourself permission** to play hard and visit badness on the PCs. If you've got a tendency to pull punches (and don't we all?), it can really help to have an impending doom established or to give your bad guys a move like "tear an arm off."

Prep only as much as you find useful and valuable. Unless you're making something for other GMs to use, there's no point in writing down details that are self-evident to you. Don't write down what Nia looks like unless you think you'll forget or it's something you specifically want to call attention to in play.

Consider prepping some or all of the following:

Threats

The ongoing, recurring problems that cause trouble for the PCs. Things that are going to get worse if left unchecked, or complicated relationships that you want to explore more in play. There's a whole chapter on prepping and using threats (page XX).

Hooks

When you want to push the PCs into the field with a threat or an opportunity, it pays to prepare a hook. A hook involves: setup questions, a plan for framing initial scenes, some specific GM moves you plan to make, and some possible reactions. See the **First Adventure** chapter (page XX) for guidelines on preparing a hook.

Expeditions

If you know (or suspect) that the PCs will leave town, you might prepare your choices for the **Chart a Course** move (see page XX). Consider drawing a map, prepping points of interest, and roughly imagining a few encounters that they might have en route. See the **What to prep** section of the **Expeditions** chapter (page XX) for details.

Locations

Think about each important place you expect the PCs to explore or encounter during a session. What's it like? How will you describe it? What questions will you ask about it? What's its story? Do you need a map or a visual aid? Are there dangers or discoveries within? See page XX for ideas.

Dangers

The hazards and monsters and hostile NPCs that the PCs might encounter. Find entries in the **Setting Guide** to use, or make your own. You can do this on the fly, of course, but it takes up table time and it's best to have it done in advance. See the chapter on **Dangers** (page XX) for guidelines.

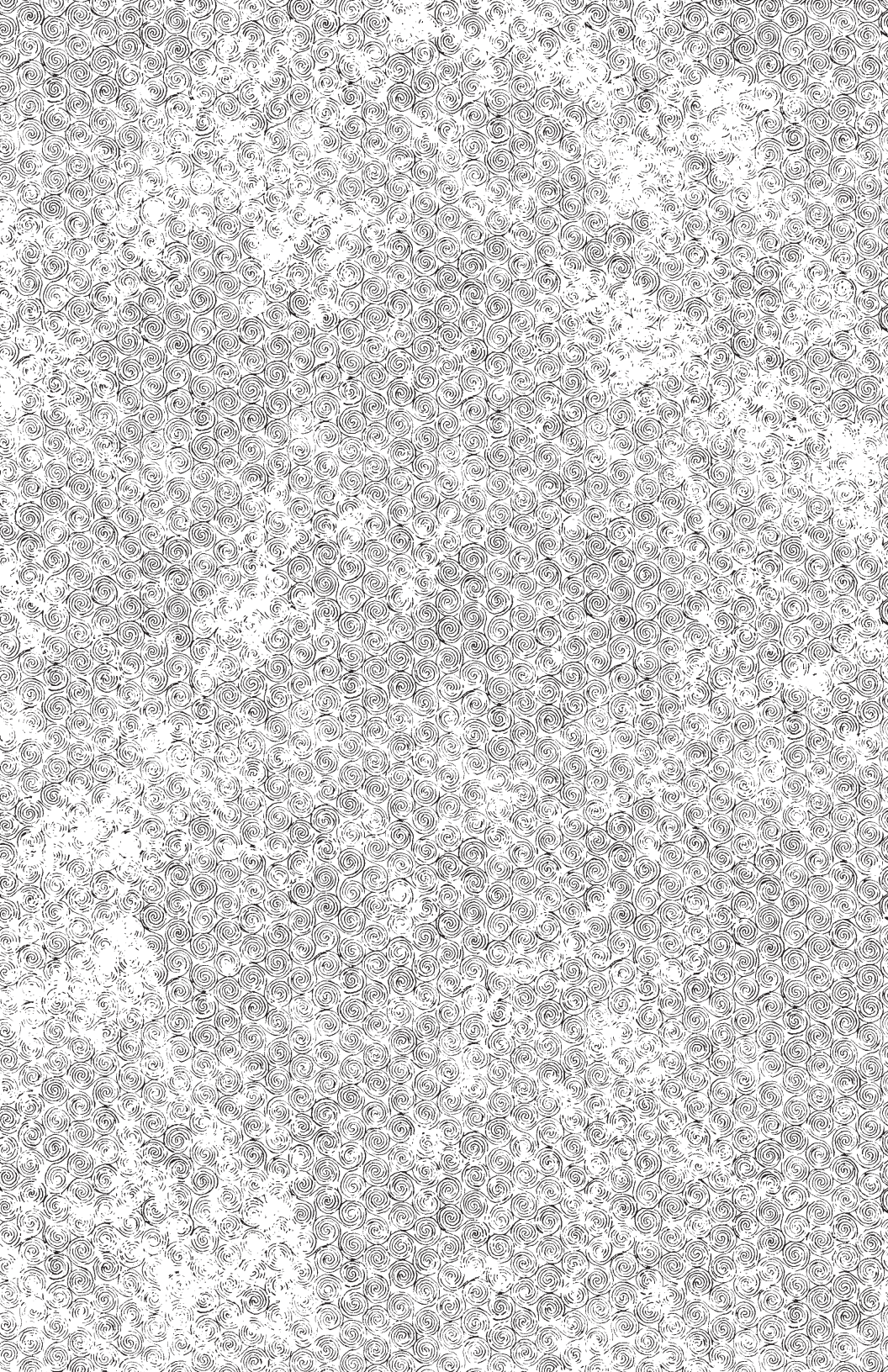
Discoveries

Puzzles, clues, mysteries, treasures, arcana... these are all discoveries. Some of them you'll just wing on the fly. Some you'll want to make a few notes on. Some (especially arcana) you'll want to write up in detail. See page XX for more.

NPCs

If there are NPCs that you expect they'll encounter in play, think about their names, the questions you'll ask about them, their defining traits, how you'll describe them and portray them. Maybe give them an instinct, connections, and motivations. If an NPC might end up as a follower, consider writing down their stats, tags, moves, cost, and instinct before play. See page XX for guidelines.

All this prep might seem like it goes against **playing to find out what happens**, but it really doesn't. You're not prepping a story, or a plot, or an inevitable series of scenes that follow one after the other. You're prepping things that give you interesting stuff to say, that speed up play, that shore up your weaknesses and hone your craft, and that give yourself permission to play hard. Good prep doesn't involve scripting everything out; it involves laying a groundwork to help you improvise.



Player Moves



Basic Moves
Special Moves

Basic Moves

The basic moves are the ones that every player and PC can use, the ones that get used most often, and the ones that drive most of the game.

Each move has a **trigger**, which tells us when the move kicks in. The trigger is almost always fictional; the player declares that their character does something that meets the trigger, and the rest of the move tells us how to resolve that course of action.

Players might trigger a move intentionally, describing actions that they know meet the trigger. Or, they might also say “I want to Clash” or “I Defend.” That’s fine. But when they do, it’s your job to draw the fiction out of them. “Cool, what do you do?” “Okay, great, what’s that look like?” If you can’t picture it, ask for more detail. **To do it, they have to do it.**

The opposite is also true: **if they do it, they have to do it.** When they say that they run past the crinwin and you deem it dangerous, high-stakes, and chancy, they’re Defying Danger. They can back out (“Oh, I didn’t realize, I don’t want to do that”), but if they carry on, the move triggers and they need to roll.

It’s everyone’s job to watch for moves getting triggered, even if it’s usually you who makes the call. Any player can, at any time, say “isn’t that Defend?” and if the table agrees, then the triggering player makes with the dice. If there’s disagreement about whether a move is getting triggered, or which move is getting triggered, talk it out, ask questions, and remember to follow your principles and pursue your agenda.



When a move says to “roll +[STAT],” that means: roll 2d6 and add whichever stat is indicated (STR, DEX, etc.). A result of a 10+ is a strong hit; a 7-9 is a weak hit (but still a hit). The basic moves all say what happens on a 10+ or a 7-9.

On a 6 or less, it’s a miss. That means:

- ⊙ They mark XP
- ⊙ You make a hard GM move (page **XX**)

Your hard move might reflect the PC screwing up, but it could also reflect something preventing them from succeeding or even attempting the action they declared. It could even reflect them doing what they set out to do, but with terrible consequences.

The basic moves don’t say what happens on a 6-; this is just how they work.

Advantage and disadvantage

When a player *has advantage on a roll*, they roll an extra die and discard the lowest. On a most moves, that means rolling 3d6 and totaling the two highest dice.

When a player *has disadvantage on a roll*, they roll an extra die and discard the highest. On most moves, that means rolling 3d6 and totaling two lowest dice.

When a player *has both advantage and disadvantage on a roll*, they cancel each other out.

See “The Special Moves” (page **XX**) for details.



Player Moves

DEFY DANGER

When *danger looms, the stakes are high, and you do something chancy*, check if another move applies. If not, roll...

- ... +STR to power through or test your might
- ... +DEX to employ speed, agility, or finesse
- ... +CON to endure or hold steady
- ... +INT to apply expertise or enact a clever plan
- ... +WIS to exert willpower or rely on your senses
- ... +CHA to charm, bluff, impress, or fit in

On a 10+, you pull it off as well as one could hope; **on a 7-9**, you can do it, but the GM will present a lesser success, a cost, or a consequence (and maybe a choice between them, or a chance to back down).

If a PC's action could trigger both Defy Danger and another move (like swinging a hatchet at the drake that's chewing on their leg), then the other move takes precedence (in this case, Clash).

Don't call for Defy Danger just because you think "they should have to roll." If a character does something chancy, but there's no looming danger or the stakes just aren't that high, then don't roll make the roll. Just make a call and say what happens, following your principles and agenda.

When you call for Defy Danger, say what the danger and/or the stakes are. "That sounds like Defy Danger, the danger is that it'll notice before you can stab it." Or "I think that's Defy Danger, and on a miss, you'll freeze up with fear." If you can't articulate the danger or the stakes, they're not Defying Danger.

If it's unclear which stat they're using, ask questions until it is. If it could go either way, say what you're thinking and let the player pick. "That could either be testing your might or enduring, so STR or CON, your choice."

Don't suffer nonsense. If you say "an arrow is flying at you, what do you do?" and they reply with something like "I flash a smile at the arrow and charm it into missing me," they aren't Defying Danger—they're taking an arrow in the face. **Tell them the consequences and ask** if they still want to do that.

On a 10+, they do it as well as one could hope. Describe what happens (or ask them to). Often, you'll give them an opportunity to act. But if the danger was particularly dire or their action particularly desperate (or reckless), then maybe the best one could hope for is simply avoiding the worst of it.

On a 7-9, present a lesser success, cost, or consequence. There should be something obvious, or else they wouldn't be Defying Danger.

- ⊗ **Lesser success:** they get most of what they wanted but not all of it. "You leap across the pit, but end up hanging half-off. It'll take time to pull yourself up."
- ⊗ **Cost:** they do it, but they lose or suffer something in the process. "You leap across the pit, but land badly and twist your ankle."
- ⊗ **Consequence:** they do it, but with an unwelcome outcome. "You leap across the pit, but the platform crumbles as you jump. No going back that way!"

Consider giving them a choice between two or more lesser successes/costs/consequences, and/or the chance to back down and not do the thing after all. Players often feel better about adversity that they choose than they feel about adversity imposed upon them. Just be sure to make the bad options proportional.

Remember: a 7-9 is still fundamentally a success. Don't make the lesser success, cost, or consequence so bad that they'd have been better off doing nothing.

On a 6-, though? Go nuts. The danger comes to bear before they can act, or as they act. Or, their action is successful but things get much worse as a result. Do something that flows naturally from the fiction and your prep. **Let things burn.**

Caradoc is hanging from a tree, his grip slipping. He swings his legs up around the bough, then pulls himself up. "Yeah, that's Defying Danger—the danger is that you fall like 80 feet. Sounds like testing your might, so +STR?"

"Sounds right," he says, and rolls. On a 7-9, I'll go with a cost and have him mark weakened from fear and fatigue. But, no, he rolls a 10, so I say "Cool, you do it, just like you said." Then I offer an opportunity. "It takes a moment to catch your breath, but from here it's an easy climb up to the nest. What do you do?"

Blodwen freezes, hearing the trills of drakes as they encircle her in the grass. She pulls out a clay pot, then tosses it, hoping to distract them.

"Clever! Sounds like Defying Danger with INT." She rolls a 7 and I give her a choice: "They take the bait, but you're not free and clear yet. You can either mark off 2 more uses of supplies and huck more stuff past them, to draw them away. Or you can try to slip away now, Defying Danger with DEX. What do you do?"

Rhianna rushes past the crinwin. "I think you're Defying Danger here, with DEX to rely on speed." On a 10+ she'll get past them, no problem, and make it to the mouth of the cave.

But she gets a 9 and I opt for a consequence: "As you rush past them, a couple turn and tackle you." Rhianna's player calls shenanigans—a 7-9 should still be fundamentally successful. "Oh, right!" I say. "You get to the mouth of the cave, but two crinwin are bounding after you, hot on your tail, what do you do?"

Player Moves



AID

When you *help someone who has not yet rolled*, the GM picks 1:

- ◎ They can accomplish more than they could alone
- ◎ They gain advantage on their roll.

Either way, you are exposed to any risk, cost, or consequence associated with their roll.

Invoke this move when one PC triggers a move and another PC (or follower) assists, or if two or more characters make the same move at once.

As with any move: to do it, they have to do it. If a player says something vague like “yeah, I’ll Aid!” or “can I help?” then say “sure, how do you help?” If they can’t come up with something plausible, then Aid doesn’t trigger.

Choose “they can accomplish more than they could alone” if the main move would be impossible without help, or if you think the Aid makes the main move take less time or have greater effect. Choose “they gain advantage on their roll” if the first PC *could* do it alone but the Aid makes it easier. Clarify the player’s intent and approach if you’re unsure which option applies.

Involve both characters in any negative results of the move. Even on a 10+ with no obvious consequence, consider making a soft move at the Aiding character to show how their Aid put them at risk.

Optional technique: when Aid grants advantage, have the helping player roll the extra d6. It makes them feel more involved!

The PCs are investigating the clearing where Pryder and Rheinal were attacked. Vahid pokes around, looking for clues. "Sounds like you're Seeking Insight," I say.

Rhianna says she'll have her crew look around, too. "Especially Lowri, he's the best tracker. Should I Seek Insight, too?"

"No, let's say that he's Aiding Vahid," I say. "Are y'all splitting up the clearing, to work more quickly? Or, like working together, kicking ideas around, giving him advantage?"

"How much time could we save?" Rhianna asks. I tell her that it'd save maybe 30 minutes. "Hmm. No, let's be thorough. I'll have Lowri back Vahid up and advise."

"Okay! Vahid, roll to Seek Insight with advantage."

Caradoc is pinned by a nailadd—a giant spider—and it's about to bite him with those venomous jaws. He twists and shoves it, trying to get free, and we've all agreed that this is Defying Danger with STR.

"Can I help?" asks Blodwen.

"Sure, what do you do to help?"

"I'll move in and start yelling at it, poking it with my staff. I don't want to hurt it, though!" (Blodwen's got a soft spot for critters.)

"Riiight, no hurting the giant spider. Roll with advantage, Caradoc." He gets an 8, and I pick a cost that involves Blodwen.

"Caradoc, you hear yelling and feel the thing shift, and manage to roll free. But as you do, you see it knock Blodwen's staff from her grip. It's about to pounce on her. What do you do?"

Rhianna yells "bring it down!" and she, Gareth, and Eira (her crew members) start peppering the drake with arrows. That's Let Fly with her crew providing Aid. Rhianna absolutely could make the move on her own, so gets to roll with advantage.

Alas, she still gets a 6. "Roll damage anyhow," I say, "but even if you bring it down, it rushes in and bashes you with its bony crest for d8+2 forceful damage, tossing you aside, and then it claws either Eira or Gareth for another d8+2, messy and 1 piercing. Who does it get?"

"I have to pick?"

"Yup."

Blodwen has called up a wind spirit and is asking it to scout the crumbling ruins. "You're going to have to roll +CHA for Persuade," I say.

"Can I help?" asks Vahid. I ask him how he does it. "Maybe I know something about these spirits, like what motivates them?" But that's not Aiding, that's Knowing Things. Maybe he does Know Things and uses what I tell him to Aid, but he's not Aiding now!

The chamber collapsed, pinning Blodwen under a pile of debris and timber. Caradoc staggers over and pries up one the timbers. "You're still stuck under a bunch of rubble, though, Blodwen. If you want to dig free, that'd be Defying Danger with STR. The danger is that you can't get free before Caradoc's strength gives out."

Caradoc asks if he's Aiding. "You are!" I say. "You're giving her the chance to try to get free. But she's not going to get advantage, if that's what you mean."

Player Moves

DEFEND

When you *take up a defensive stance* or *jump in to protect others*, roll +CON: **on a 10+**, hold 3 Readiness (or 4 if you bear a shield); **on a 7-9**, hold 1 Readiness (or 2 with a shield). You can spend Readiness 1-for-1 to:

- ☉ Suffer an attack's damage/effects instead of your ward
- ☉ Halve an attack's effect or damage
- ☉ Draw all attention from your ward to yourself
- ☉ Strike back at an attacker (deal your damage, with disadvantage)

When you *go on the offense, cease to focus on defense, or the threat passes*, lose any Readiness that you hold.

This move can trigger proactively or reactively.

Proactively: there's danger afoot but no imminent, in-process attack. They ready themselves to receive and repel danger: planting their feet, raising shield and spear, eyes sharp, etc. Maybe they step near/in front of the person they mean to Defend. Maybe they dig in to hold a position or protect some valuable item. Maybe they're just Defending themselves.

Reactively: you've made a move that establishes a specific, imminent attack against one character, and another character's player says something like "I step in front of them!" or "I tackle them out of the way." This version only works when they protect someone (or maybe something) else. If they're reactively protecting themselves, that's Defy Danger or maybe Clash.

A character *can* jump in to Defend another after you've already described an attack landing, as long as everyone agrees that, yeah, they could have done that.

On a 7+, the player holds Readiness and can spend it to do one of the listed options, no roll required. Players can spend Readiness multiple times in response to a single attack, but can only pick each option once against any given attack. Remember to **begin and end with the fiction**—ask the player what it looks like when they spend their Readiness.

Players can spend Readiness only in ways that make sense. They can't interrupt an attack that they can't perceive, or strike back at a foe that's out of reach.

Halving an attack's damage/effects reduces the damage before applying Armor. Work with the player to determine what halving the effect means. Maybe they stagger instead of falling, or maybe the tentacle grabs just one arm instead of fully ensnaring them.

If they strike back at an attacker, any tags on their damage (like *forceful* or *messy*) apply. This option won't, by itself, stop or prevent the attack, even if they drop the attacker. They're spending Readiness in *response* to the attack, not before it.

Players can trigger other moves while they hold Readiness, and spend it in response to those moves' outcomes. That's the point! But if they get aggressive or give up their defensive stance, the Readiness is lost.

When someone Defends proactively and rolls a 6-, escalate the situation aggressively. If they Defend *reactively* and gets a 6-, well, your hard move will probably be pretty obvious.

Rheinal (an NPC) gets pounced on by a nailadd, and Vahid tries to save him. "I grab him and pull him behind me." That's Defend! Vahid rolls an 8, and spends his 1 Readiness immediately.

"It's going to tackle him, do 1d8 damage, and pump him full of poison," I say. "If you want to save him, you could either take the blow, or halve the damage/effect." He asks if he can roll the damage before deciding and I'm like "Of course!" He rolls a 5, and chooses to suffer the attack in Rheinal's place, poison and all.

Caradoc trips while running from a drake, and Rhianna turns and starts yelling at it, getting between them. "Sounds like you're Defending Caradoc, yeah?"

"Yup. I promised his ma I'd bring him home safe." She rolls a 7, spending her Readiness to draw attention from her ward to herself. "I'm yelling, clanging my spear and knife, and circling so it's not looking at Caradoc."

"Cool! Caradoc, that drake was right on you, but it just turned to hiss at Rhianna. You're able to get to your feet, what do you do?" He, of course, decides to stab it (and Rhianna curses under her breath).

Blodwen approaches Wynfor, who's got this creepy, beatific look on her face. Vahid's hanging back, guarding the door. He rolled Defend, and is holding 1 Readiness.

When Wynfor stabs Blodwen out of the blue, Vahid is like "I spend Readiness to halve the damage!" But I don't think so. He's by the door, 3 or 4 paces away, and she knifed Blodwen with no warning. "Keep your Readiness," I say, "but you weren't in position to protect Blodwen from Wynfor at all."

Blodwen is tending to Pryder's wounds when Caradoc hears a strange motley of animal noises approaching—crinwin! He gulps, moves to the entrance, and hoists his shield and spear. That's a defensive position, for sure, so he rolls +CON to Defend. He gets a 10+, and holds 3 Readiness, +1 for his shield.

"The first two crinwin rush you, one bounding at your face and the other going low! What do you do?"

He holds his ground, shield up, stabbing as they get near. That's fighting in melee, so a Clash. "Do I keep my Readiness?" he asks, and yeah, I think he does—he's fighting, but defensively. (If he'd rushed out to meet them, then no, his Readiness would be gone).

Alas, he rolls a 4 to Clash so I **put him a spot**, and hard: "The first one bowls you over while the second grabs your leg and bites down, hard! That'll be d6+1 damage." He rolls 5 damage, but spends 1 Readiness to halve the attack's damage and effects. That becomes 3 damage, less 1 for his Armor. "What's this look like, then?" I ask "How are the effects halved?"

"I think I keep my feet, but the first one is hanging on my shield while the other one chomps my ankle. And, yeah, I'll spend one more Readiness to strike back, bashing the one on my shield against door frame. Cool?"

Very cool. He deals his damage (with disadvantage), and he's still got 2 Readiness left.

"Okay, Blodwen, while this is going on..."

Player Moves

SEEK INSIGHT

When you *study a situation or person*, looking to the GM for insight, roll +WIS: **on a 10+**, ask the GM 3 questions from the list below; **on a 7-9**, ask 1; **either way**, take advantage on your next move to act on the answers.

- ⑥ What happened here recently?
- ⑥ What is about to happen?
- ⑥ What should I be on the lookout for?
- ⑥ What here is useful or valuable to me?
- ⑥ Who or what is really in control here?
- ⑥ What here is not what it appears to be?

Seek Insight triggers when a character does something to gain *insight*. Don't call for the move just because a player asks what they see or hear. Call for it when they look to you to put the pieces together, or to reveal more than what's obvious.

The PC must actually *study a situation or person*. If the player just says that they Seek Insight, ask what that looks like. It could be subtle ("I scan his office while they talk") or overt ("I toss the room—taking books off shelves, looking in those pots, tapping the walls, etc."), but it has to be *something*.

On a 7+, the player asks one or more questions from the list. The list drives players to ask meaningful questions, ones that grant insight rather than just detail. No need to be a stickler about it, though. If they ask a good question that's not on the list, feel free to answer it. Or, accept their question but *answer* a question from the list.

Answer honestly, generously, and helpfully. Rely on your prep and sense of the fiction to guide you. You'll often need to make up details on the fly. These details become true parts of the fiction!

If you're unsure how to answer, ask the player for guidance. "Well, the old coins are obviously valuable, but what sort of thing were you looking for?"

Begin and end with the fiction! Don't just say that Siowan is about to betray them; describe how Siowan's acting nervous, glancing at the door like someone's about to burst in. Alternately: give them a direct, simple answer and then ask *them* what details led them to that conclusion.

Adjust your answers to reflect the fiction. The move isn't magic; it doesn't let PCs know things that they couldn't. A quick scan of the room from the entrance should give less-specific and less-useful insights than if they get in there and interact.

The best answer is often the obvious one. "What's valuable? The coins. Everything else is junk." Sometimes, the only honest answer is "nothing." "There's nothing to be on the lookout for. This place is quite safe." "No one's in control. It's a damn free-for-all." Such answers remove doubt and clarify the situation (and the PC still gets advantage to act on the answer).

On a 10+, the player gets advantage on only one roll, the first one that acts on any of the answers. If they ask three questions, they get advantage once, not thrice.

On a 6- during a tense, dangerous scene, your move will often involve the character getting interrupted or surprised as they study the situation.

When they get a 6- to Seek Insight in “safe” situation, you might use your move to **announce trouble** that wasn’t there before. You might **reveal an unwelcome truth** or **advance towards impending doom**, deciding that something bad happened off-camera before they got here. Or you might **use up their resources** and say how they learn nothing but their torches are running low.

Don’t remove a player’s agency on a 6-. You might **turn their move back on them** and feed them false information or a bad idea, but only do so if the player is onboard and enjoys the dramatic irony. Likewise, don’t presume that the PC acts contrary to how the player triggered the move. If they said they were scanning the room, don’t say that they stepped inside and sprung a trap.

The PCs are staring up at a crinwin nest. They ask about its size (“big as a house”), the tree it’s in (“like a sequoia redwood”) and if there’s movement in the nest (“nope”). Then Rhianna asks “Any recent activity? We’ll look for tracks and whatnot.” That’s looking for insight, so she triggers Seeking Insight.

She rolls +WIS (with advantage from her crew Aiding) and gets a 10. “Is the nest still active? Any signs of recent activity?” she asks. I direct her to ask a question from the list.

“Oh, yeah. Um, what should I be on the lookout for? Like, are any crinwin still around?” I say no, nothing to be on the lookout for. The nest is unoccupied, damaged even. Gareth (from her crew) calls her over and shows her the crinwin bodies he found, rotting away in the brush.

“Whoa. Uh... what happened here recently?”

They find more crinwin corpses, and some that look like they killed each other. “A few weeks old, at least. But not enough corpses for a full a nest. And you find signs of crinwin dragging off other crinwin, in the same general direction they carried off Pryder.”

“What the hell?” spits Rhianna. “Um... who or what is really in control here? Like, who or what is behind this?”

I know that Sajra the swyn (a giant, hypnotic, monkey-headed snake) is behind the attack, but I don’t see how Rhianna could deduce that. I give her as useful of an answer as I think the evidence could allow: “Down the path, you find a... drake scale? But bigger, flatter, with a golden shimmer to it.”

She asks if she recognizes it. “I don’t know,” I say, “sounds like you’re Knowing Things?” And she agrees, and rolls with advantage for following up on an answer.

A fae named Thornthumb is telling them about the swyn’s lair, but his eyes linger on Vahid’s pack (where the Mindgem is). Vahid doesn’t like that one bit. “I size him up, trying to figure out what he’s up to.” That’s Seeking Insight, but he gets a 3.

I turn his move back on him, revealing something valuable to the fae. “You, like, go to pick up your pack, but drop it and the Mindgem falls out!” But Vahid’s player isn’t having it. He wasn’t touching his pack, and the Mindgem is packed at the very bottom.

“Shoot, you’re right. How about this? Before you can get a read on him, he like bounds off through the brush, beckoning you to follow. ‘Show you the way, safe and secret,’ he says!” But something about his smile still unnerves you, Vahid. What do you all do?”

Player Moves

CLASH

When you *fight in melee or close quarters*, roll +STR: **on a 10+**, your maneuver works as expected (deal your damage) and pick 1.

- ⊙ Avoid, prevent, or counter your enemy's attack
- ⊙ Strike hard and fast, for 1d6 extra damage, but suffer your enemy's attack

On a 7-9, your maneuver works, mostly (deal your damage) but you suffer your enemy's attack.

This move covers an exchange of hand-to-hand combat: a PC tries to hurt or subdue a foe, and the foe is either actively trying to hurt/subdue them back, or is able and willing to start. If the foe can't or won't fight back, it's not Clash—the PC just deals damage (or murders them outright).

If you announce an attack (“it leaps at you, what do you do?”) and the character reacts by both defending themselves and striking back, then that's Clash. They don't usually need to Defy Danger first, unless they were already in a precarious position.

If a player says something like “I attack” or “I stab it,” probe for more detail. It's easier to resolve this move when you can picture their maneuver and understand its intent.

If their attack just wouldn't work, then Clash doesn't trigger. Instead, **tell them the requirements** (“you need to get inside his guard first”) or **reveal an unwelcome truth** (“your spear goes right through, it's like stabbing mist”) or **put them in a spot** (“it swats your spear aside and jabs at your throat, what do you do?”).

On a 7+, their maneuver works (or mostly works, on a 7-9) and they've got a chance to hurt their foe—the damage roll tells us how much. Even if they don't drop their foe (or get through its Armor), their maneuver still basically works. The fictional situation should change to reflect that!

“Suffer your enemy's attack,” doesn't just mean taking damage. It means that you use the enemy to make an aggressive, hard GM move against the character. You can **hurt them** (“it smashes your helmet and the world is spinning—take 1d8+3 damage and mark *dazed*”), but you can also **put them in a spot** (“you stab it, but it smashes you against the railing for 1d6 damage, and the railing cracks and starts to give”), or **use up their resources** (“you stab it, but it bucks and twists and your spear goes flying”), or make any other GM move that makes sense—especially one of the monster's moves! If the move would potentially hurt the PC, rough them up, or take them out, then deal damage as part of the move.

When a PC deals damage and suffers an enemy's attack, have the player roll damage before you decide what the enemy's attack looks like. If you know you're going to do something that deals damage to the PC, you can roll (or have the player roll) the monster's damage before deciding on your move. Let the damage dealt (plus Armor, tags, and whether each combatant is left standing) inform the move that you make.

On a 6-, the obvious result is that the player's maneuver fails and they suffer the enemy's attack. But you can make any move that follows your principles. Maybe they strike a killing blow, but the monster falls and crushes a follower! Maybe they cut down this foe but the next one clocks them on the head and the PC is captured.

When a character's attack could feasibly hurt multiple foes—because of the area tag, because they describe it in a way that makes sense, etc.—then they roll to Clash just once for the whole group, but they roll damage separately for each individual foe.

When multiple PCs and/or followers attack a foe at once, one of them Clashes while the others Aid.

When multiple combatants deal damage to a single foe, roll one combatant's damage (usually the best one) and add +1 damage for each capable attacker after the first. Apply tags from all attackers as they make sense.

See also “Running monsters and combat” (page XX), especially “Foes they can't hurt” (page XX), “Multiple combatants” (page XX), and “Keeping fights interesting” (page XX).

The nailadd lets Caradoc go and pounces on Blodwen, biting her with paralytic venom. Caradoc's like “I attack! Clash?”

“Probably, yeah. What's this look like?”

“I roll to my feet, pick up my shield and rush in to bash it off her.”

Blodwen asks if it's even Clash, since it's focused on her. “Yeah,” I say, “it just poisoned you, and it's super quick. I think it's able to defend itself from Caradoc.”

So Caradoc rolls +STR and gets an 11, wisely choosing to avoid the enemy's attack. Alas, his damage is only a 2, not enough to get past the spider's armor. “So, nothing happens?” he asks.

“It doesn't take damage, but your maneuver works. You bash it clear off of Blodwen, and it flops on its back, flailing for a bit while it tries to right itself. What do you do?”

The crinwin has Rhianna pinned, making these weird cooing noises as it tries to choke her. “I push it back with one hand and pull my knife with the other. Stab stab.” That's fighting in close quarters, so she rolls +STR to Clash. She gets a 12!

*“Do you avoid its attack? Or do extra damage?” She opts for the extra damage and rolls a d8 (her damage die) plus a d6, for 7 damage total. That's enough to drop it, but she also suffers the crinwin's attack. I consider having it **hurt her**, bashing her head with a rock while she stabs it, but decide to **reveal an unwelcome truth** instead.*

“So, you stab it like five or six times, its cold black blood pouring over you. But crinwin are cowardly, right? A good stab should have sent this thing running. This one? It keeps choking you, making those coo-cooing noises, not blinking or flinching until it bleeds out. Take a d6 damage, and what's going through your head right now?”

The swyn locked eyes with Vahid and tried to crush his will, but Vahid resisted and has successfully pretended otherwise. “It slithers closer,” I tell him, “hissing ‘coomme with meee.’ It turns to go, what do you do?”

“I've got my lantern out, right? I smash it in the face. Clash?”

The swyn thought Vahid was under its sway and not expecting an attack. “No, no Clash. Just deal your damage!”

Player Moves

INTERFERE

When you try to foil another PC's action and neither of you back down, roll...

- ... +STR to power through or test your might
- ... +DEX to employ speed, agility, or finesse
- ... +CON to endure or hold steady
- ... +INT to apply expertise or enact a clever plan
- ... +WIS to exert willpower or rely on your senses
- ... +CHA to charm, bluff, impress, or fit in

On a 10+, they pick 1 from the list below; **on a 7-9**, they pick 1 from the list below but you are left off-balance, exposed, or otherwise vulnerable.

- ☉ Do it anyway, but with disadvantage on their (next) roll
- ☉ Relent, change course, or otherwise allow their move to be foiled

Invoke this move when a PC acts, another PC tries to stop them, and the first PC persists. Stop and discuss the situation, giving both players the chance to back off. Either player can relent without going to the dice.

On a 7+, the initial player (the one being interfered with) chooses: act anyway with disadvantage on their next roll, or relent. If they choose to act, but doing so doesn't trigger a move, then they take disadvantage on their next roll—even if that roll is unrelated. Ask the acting player why the disadvantage lingers. Maybe they're angry or distracted, or doubting themselves.



On a 7-9, the Interfering character is off-balance, exposed, or vulnerable. Give the other PC an opportunity to retaliate. If that's impossible or unlikely, put the Interfering character in a spot and/or shift the spotlight to someone else.

On a 6-, the obvious outcome is that they fail to prevent the initial PC's action. The initial PC does what they started doing, and either that triggers a PC move or you say what happens. Don't let the initial PC back down now! They committed, or else Interfere wouldn't have been rolled.

Technically, though, a 6- to Interfere means you get to make a hard GM move. Maybe the Interfering PC foils the initial action after all, but doing makes things much, much worse.

To be clear: Interfere doesn't apply against monsters or most NPCs. It might apply against followers, when they're acting on another PC's orders, but you'll need to figure that out case-by-case.

Wynfor just stabbed Blodwen, to everyone's surprise, and Rhianna reacts: "Oh screw this. I shoot her. In the leg."

Even though Blodwen just got stabbed by the glassy-eyed girl, she's says "RHLANNA, NO!" and puts her hand up to stop her. I ask Rhianna if she shoots. If she does, Blodwen will be Interfere.

But Rhianna holds her shot. "I've still got my bow drawn, though. 'Back off, girl, and drop the knife. I'd rather not have to explain a hole in your leg to your ma."

Caradoc is still hearing the swyn's voice, hissing bad ideas in his head, and Rhianna just gave him a dressing down. I lean in and say "Sssseee? Contempt! Shhhhow her what you're made ofuuu." I offer him an XP if he attacks Rhianna, and he goes for it.

"I growl and swing my shield at her, like SHUT UP! Clash?"

"Probably, but hold on. Rhianna, Caradoc is attacking you, what do you do?"

"What? No. I step back, dodging that shield and kicking his leg out from under him."

Caradoc doesn't back down and neither does Rhianna, so she rolls +DEX to Interfere. She gets a 7. Caradoc can either Clash with disadvantage or let his attack be foiled. He lets it be foiled, but Rhianna's off-balance and/or vulnerable.

"Rhianna, you kick Caradoc's leg out but he tumbles into you. You both fall, him on top. Caradoc, you're on your back, Rhianna under you, her face right by your elbow, and that voice hissing 'ssstrike her!' What do you do?"

Rhianna falls back and walks with Vahid for a bit. "Vahid, what's up with you and Eira? You're creeping her out." Vahid is evasive and Rhianna's like "Yeah, I stop and peer through your enigmatic old man routine. Seek Insight?"

"Sure," I say. Vahid asks if there's anything he can do about that. "You can Interfere. But tell us what that looks like."

"I smile awkwardly and say something about being a lonely old man looking at a pretty younger woman, even though that's not what's going on at all." Interesting! We agree that he's Interfering and rolls +CHA. He rolls a 4.

I consider turning his move back on him and giving Rhianna advantage to Seek Insight. But I'd rather let this issue simmer, so I announce trouble and cut the conversation short. "Rhianna, he gives you that bogus line but before you can process it, Garet yells 'DRAKES!' and there's a snarl and shouting up ahead, what do you do?"

Thorntthumb offers Blodwen a pretty flower, and she goes to take it. Vahid Interferes, trying to slap it from the spriggans' hand. He gets a 10, but Blodwen decides to take the flower anyhow. "I think he knocks it out of my hand, and I'm like 'Vahid! Apologize!'" Vahid clenches his jaw and apologizes, then stomps off. Thorntthumb grins as he goes.

Because she acted despite Vahid's 10+ to Interfere, Blodwen has disadvantage on her next roll. I ask her why she thinks that is.

"I'm disturbed," she says. "I'm telling myself that the flower was just a sweet gesture, but I keep thinking about Thorntthumb's grin and wondering if Vahid was right."

Player Moves

PERSUADE (vs NPCs)

When you *press or entice an NPC*, say what you want them to do (or not do). If they *have reason to resist*, roll +CHA: **on a 10+**, they either do as you want or reveal the easiest way to convince them; **on a 7-9**, they reveal something you can do to convince them, though it'll likely be costly, tricky, or distasteful.

This version of Persuade triggers when a PC tries to convince an NPC to do something. If you, as the NPC, put up resistance and the PC persists, it's Persuade. Clarify what they want the NPC to do/not do, and challenge their approach if it doesn't make sense. "How would she know you want her to do that? Do you, like, ask?"

Once the goal is set, decide if the NPC has reason to resist. Consider their instinct, personality, background, wants, needs, fears, etc. If they've no reason to resist, they do it. But if the NPC has a reason (even an irrational one), then call for the roll.

On a 10+, weigh the PC's approach against the NPC's resistance. If the resistance was weak or the PC's approach is strong, just have the NPC do it. But if you don't think the PC's approach would cut it, reveal the easiest way the PC could convince them.

On a 7-9, the NPC isn't convinced yet but they'll reveal a way they could be. You don't *have* to make the requirement tricky, costly, or distasteful, but it's more fun if you do.

Things that might convince an NPC include:

- ⊙ A promise/oath/vow
- ⊙ A chance to do it safely/freely/discreetly
- ⊙ Appeasing or appealing to their ego/honor/conscience/fears
- ⊙ A convincing deception
- ⊙ A better/fair/excessive offer
- ⊙ Helping them/doing it with them
- ⊙ Violence (or a credible threat thereof)
- ⊙ Something they want or need (coin/food/booze/etc.)
- ⊙ Assurance/proof/corroboration
- ⊙ Pressure/permission/help from _____
- ⊙ Or anything else that makes sense

Reveal how the NPC can be convinced by their words or reactions, and/or as insights that occur to the PC. It doesn't have to be easy, or even plausible, but the revelation has to be true.

It's okay to offer two or more alternatives on how the NPC could be convinced.

"He's waiting for a bribe; a few coppers would do it. Or you could rough him up a bit, you're pretty sure that'd work, too."

On a 6-, you might make it clear that the NPC won't be swayed, interrupt the conversation, and/or end the scene. Or, you might have the NPC comply but with complications (treachery, overzealousness, misunderstanding, etc.). Or maybe the whole interaction offends someone else, upsets the social order, or otherwise generates chaos. Your threat (page XX) and homefront moves (page XX) will be helpful here.

The PCs just killed a bunch of crinwin, only to see more pale, unblinking eyes staring down at them. "Ugh," says Rhianna, "we barely took care of this lot. I try to scare them off. Persuade?"

"Cool. What do you do, exactly?"

"I hoist the nearest crinwin corpse by its head. Glare out at the other crinwin. Then I'll saw its head off, start yelling, and chuck the head into the woods. And keep yelling."

Yikes! And yet, the crinwin outnumber them and the PCs are pretty beaten-up, so I think they have reason to resist. Rhianna rolls +CHA and gets an 11. I think that little display was plenty, so I say "They scamper right off and you're left standing there, covered in black blood. Caradoc, how are you feeling about Rhianna right now?"

Caradoc is keeping watch with Gareth, and he pries a bit. "You've been with Rhianna's crew for a long time, right? You ever seen anything like... uh, like that?" I'm trying to get him talking, maybe learn something about Rhianna's past. Persuade?"

I consider making him roll, but I realize that Gareth's got no real reason to resist. "Sure, but don't bother rolling, he's happy to talk. Rhianna, what's a good story for him to tell Caradoc? Like, a time you did something bloody and ruthless?"

Blodwen crouches down to eye-level with Nia, keeping her distance and holding out some flatbread. "Hey. Hey, are you hungry?"

I'm sure she's enticing the girl to do something, but I'm not sure what. "Are you, like, trying to get her to come out from the corner?"

"More like I'm trying to get her to trust me and start talking." Nia is terrified, which is cause to resist, so Blodwen rolls. She gets a 10, and I think about Nia and look at the list of things that could convince her. I think appeasing her fears would do it.

"Her eyes lock on the flatbread, and she swallows, but then her eyes dart to Caradoc, then Rhianna, then her crew. She's scared of the warriors. You bet she'd calm down if they were gone." Blodwen asks the others to step outside, and they agree. "Cool. As soon as they leave, the girl snatches the bread and wolfs it down, staring at you. Then she gulps, and says 'More?' What do you do?"

Vahid is up in Gordin's Delve, selling a sphere of silver filigree. Mutra the Yellow has offered two handfuls of silver for it. "Why, this is worth four handfuls of silver at least," says Vahid. "I could get two handfuls just by melting it down."

*"Sounds like you're pressing him into giving you more coin for it, yeah? He's definitely got reason to resist, so roll to Persuade." On a 10+, I think Mutra would ask for more info about the sphere's provenance, and give up the silver for the truth or a convincing lie. And on a miss, I think I'd **reveal an unwelcome truth**, saying that Mutra says no deal but Vahid suspects that he'll send thugs to try and steal the sphere later.*

But Vahid gets an 8, and I go for something distasteful. "Fab! You'd barely get a single handful if you melted thbbhis down. But I tell you what... I'll pay two handfuls now, and if you show my man Gunthbber where you found thbbhis beauty, I'll thbbbrov in two more handfuls of silver on his safe return." He smiles with his too-sharp teeth. "Do we havvve a deal?"

Player Moves

PERSUADE (vs PCs)

When you *press or entice a PC and they resist*, ask their player: “Could I possibly get you to do this, yes or no?” If they say “no,” let it drop.

If they say “yes,” you can roll +CHA: **on a 10+**, they mark XP if they do what you want, and if they don’t, they must say how you could convince them; **on a 7-9**, they mark XP if they do what you want (but can refuse or make a counter-offer if they like).

When one PC wants another PC to do something, and the other PC is putting up resistance, invoke this move.

The first part of the move—where the first player asks if they could possibly convince the other player’s character—is crucial. It prevents the mechanics from pressuring a player into doing something that they don’t think their character would do.

If the answer is “no,” ask the target player how the first character can tell. Is it clear in their eyes? Do they say something? Do they walk away? “What’s this look like?” If the first character keeps pressuring them, call a time out and tell their player that they need to let it drop—they’re being rude, not respecting their fellow player, and ignoring the rules of the game.

If the answer is “yes,” then ask the first player (the one whose character is doing the pressing/enticing) if they want to roll. If they roll, cool. If they don’t roll, they need to let it drop.

On a 10+, the target player marks XP if they do what’s being asked of them without any further convincing. If they refuse, they must reveal how they could be convinced. They can make this revelation in-character (“I’ll do this, Rhianna, but only if you promise that no one gets killed”) or described as insight (“My eyes dart to Vahid, and I think you’d realize that I won’t answer with him in the room”) or discussed player-to-player (“I’ll agree to stay, but only if you promise to bring that thing’s corpse home for me to study”).

On a 7-9, the target player marks XP if they do what’s being asked of them without any further convincing. They don’t mark XP if they make a counter-offer (even if they eventually agree to it).

On a 6-, you might **turn their move back on them** and let the targeted player ask how they could get the Persuading character to do something. Or you could interrupt the conversation with some other move, like **introducing a threat** or **changing the environment**. Don’t presume actions or reactions from either player, and don’t tell them how they feel. If you’re stumped, query the table (particularly the targeted player) for ideas.

Persuade or Interfere?

Use Persuade when one PC tries to get another PC to *agree* to a course of action. Use Interfere when one PC has *initiated* a course of action, and another PC tries to stop or foil them.

If one PC Persuades another, the other PC can Interfere with that attempt at persuasion (by exercising willpower, bluffing, etc.).



The swyn is dead, the children rescued, and they're getting ready to head home. But Vabid doesn't want to go. "There's so much here to learn! We can't just leave!"

Rhianna is resisting, so I direct Vabid's player to this move. He asks her player if he could possibly convince her.

Rhianna's player very quickly says "No." I ask what that looks like, how Vabid can tell she won't budge. "Oh I lose it. Dammit it, Vabid. We're going and that's final!"

Vabid replies with "Fine. Leave then. But I'm staying. I can make my own way home."

Rhianna sighs, pinches the bridge of her nose, and very calmly says. "No, Vabid. You won't. You will get lost. And die. Please come with us." So now she is pressing him.

But Vabid doesn't cave. "You could convince me," he says, "But you'll have to have roll. And I'll Interfere by being stubborn as hell." Rhianna says she'll roll Persuade, and Vabid rolls to Interfere (with WIS, for willpower). He gets an 11, and Rhianna decides to keep

pressuring him and roll with disadvantage. "I Aid," says Blodwen. "I step up behind Rhianna and give him the doe eyes. 'Vabid. Please.' We agree that this would help, and the advantage from her Aid cancels out the disadvantage from Vabid Interfering.

"Okay, so I'm rolling +CHA, then? That's it?" It is, and she gets a 10. If Vabid agrees to come now, with no more discussion, he'll mark XP. But if he refuses, he has to reveal how they could convince him.

"Okay, okay...I'll come. But only if you let me put sanctifying marks on the entrances. And promise me that we'll come back to explore this place. And don't tell anyone else about it. Deal?"

I clarify that he's revealing how they can convince him, rather than agreeing outright. If he wants the XP, he has to just agree without those caveats. "Yup!" he says.

"Fine," sighs Rhianna. "You've got ten minutes. Go make your marks. Blodwen, keep an eye on him."

Player Moves

KNOWTHINGS

When you *consult your accumulated knowledge*, roll +INT: **on a 10+**, the GM will tell you something interesting and useful about the topic at hand; **on a 7-9**, the GM will tell you something interesting—it's on you to make it useful; **either way**, the GM might ask "how do you know this?"

When a player asks you what/if they know about something, ask them if they want to Know Things. You can also prompt them: "You might know about this as a tanner's apprentice, want to Know Things?"

Don't have players Know Things to recall common knowledge (like the fact that the roads are relatively safe) or to remember details that they've simply forgotten (like how Seren told everyone in session 2 that fae can't abide the touch of iron). Just remind them of the truth and move on.

If it's unclear what they're Knowing Things about, or what they hope to learn, then ask! It'll make the move much easier to resolve.

Players don't have to explain how they'd know about a topic before rolling. They can roll, and then you tell them something interesting and/or useful and ask them "how do you know this?" The stories your players come up with can be pure gold.

If there's really no way a character would know about a topic, then say so. "No, this is just beyond your experience." But do so sparingly! The game is better when players Know Things freely, even if it's a stretch.

On a 10+, tell them something interesting and useful (and true) about the subject. It should suggest a clear course of action, or rule one out, or both. It can help to start with "the interesting thing is ____" (giving some background info) "and the useful thing is ____" (adding that extra, useful detail). If you're unsure whether you've given them something useful, ask!

On a 7-9, you owe them something interesting, but it's on them to make it useful. If you're stuck for ideas, try one of these:

- ⊙ **Think of something useful/actionable**, but tell them something that only *hints* at that info without spelling it out.
- ⊙ **Reveal two useful but contradictory things**, without deciding which one is true until put to the test. When the PCs act on the info, look to the Die of Fate or the results of their moves to decide which one is true.
- ⊙ **Tell them something useful that they can't easily act on**. "Their plumage is quite valuable to southern merchants, and live young even more so! But this one's rushing at you right now. What do you do?"

Feel free to ask players for input on the answers, especially on topics you haven't prepped. "Sure, you tell me. How *do* these drakes hunt, and how can you use that to your advantage?"

If multiple players want to Know Things on the same topic, then have one player roll while another Aids. Discourage players from Knowing Things on the same topic multiple times. If they try, use a GM move to push the scene along.

On a 6-, you might **put them in a spot** while they ponder, or **introduce a danger** (suddenly: hagsr!). You might **reveal an unwelcome truth**, or ask the player to do so. You might **offer an opportunity** with a significant (maybe unseen) cost. You might **demonstrate a downside** to their sheltered upbringing and say they just don't know, or **tell them the requirements** ("you'll need to talk to Seren about this").

You can, on a 6-, **turn their move back on them** and tell them something that they believe to be true but that will get them into trouble if they act on it. This only works if the players are all on board, because the players know that they rolled a miss. Be careful, and don't overdo it. You can almost always do something more interesting than lie.

The PCs have been following the trail for a few hours. Rhianna asks "Is there anything out this way? My crew and I are hunters, we know the Woods pretty well."

"You're not far from the Red Grove," I say, because that's common knowledge. She asks if there's anything else. "Sounds like Knowing Things. Are you looking for more info about the Red Grove, or what?" She wants to know about other points of interest: ruins, lairs, that sort of thing. "Cool, roll +INT."

On a 6-, I'd probably have the feathered drakes from my notes show up. But she gets an 11, so I make with the info. "There's a big Maker ruin, maybe another day's march this direction. It's mostly buried, and it'd be a long way for crinwin to drag a boy as big as Pryder. But it's the most notable landmark you can think of. And it's big enough to hold a crinwin nest and some human captives. Is that sufficiently useful?" I ask.

"Yeah. Definitely." says Rhianna. "That's probably where they're headed, then."

"How do you know about the ruin?" I ask.

"Oh, I think pa and I tracked a rabid wolf this way when I was a kid. Found it dead, near the ruin, but we got spooked and left."

Vahid Knows Things about this plant-man they just caught stealing from their camp. On a 10+, I plan on telling him that this is a fae, and that fae are bound to keep their word and repay debts.

Alas, Vahid gets a 6. I decide to tell him something interesting anyway, asking a provocative question as I do. "Oh, yeah, you've met this jerk before, not long after you got to Stonetop. He's a fae, a thief named Thornthumb. How did he trick you that one time, and what did he steal?"

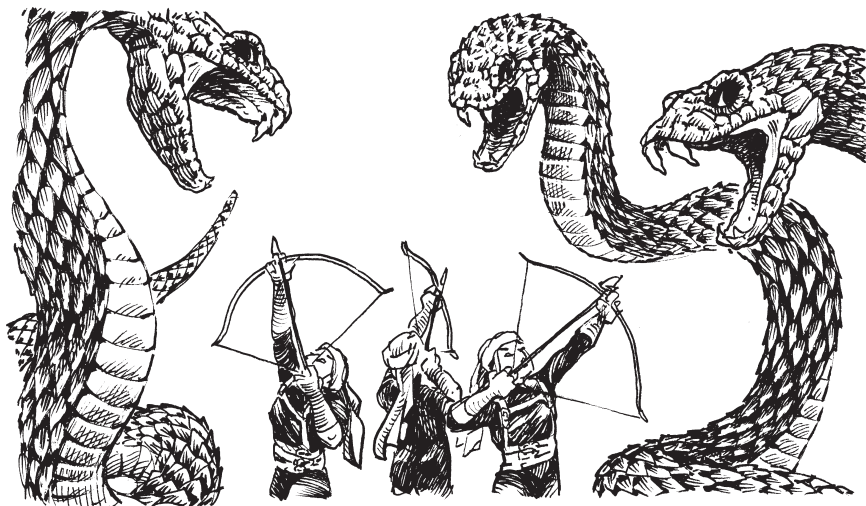
Blodwen is wondering how they can free Wynfor's mind from the swyn's influence. She Knows Things and gets a 9.

"There's an herb," I say, "uh... moonwort. It clears the mind of enchantment. Or is that silverwort? Shoot, one clears the mind, the other makes you see things, but you can't recall which is which. How'd you learn this?"

"Oh, from Gwendyl. But she's not the best teacher, and I haven't had a reason to use either herb. I can use supplies to have some, right? I've got an herb garden back home."

"Sure," I say. "But which one?" And unless she does something clever, I'll wait until she gives some to Wynfor, then have her roll the Die of Fate. On a 4+, she guesses right!

Player Moves



LET FLY

When you *launch a ranged attack*, roll +DEX: **on a 10+**, you have a clear shot—deal your damage; **on a 7-9**, deal your damage but pick 1:

- ⊙ You must move or hold steady to get the shot, placing you in danger
- ⊙ Take what you can get; you have disadvantage on your damage roll
- ⊙ Deplete your ammo, marking the next status next to your weapon (don't pick this if it's *thrown*)

Like Clash, Let Fly triggers only if there's a real chance of harming the target. If there isn't, and they shoot anyway, then **reveal an unwelcome truth, tell them the consequences, or put them in a spot.**

Unlike Clash, this move does trigger against an unaware or unprepared target; there's no free "deal damage" against someone beyond a PC's reach.

Cover, bad lighting, high winds, or the chaos of a melee might make a shot harder or riskier than normal. Or, a player might want to declare a particularly difficult shot. You can handle this by...

... **telling them the requirements:** "You need to get closer/get a better angle/wait for them step apart." Or "You want to shoot it in the eye? It'll take time to line up the shot, and you'll need to wait for the right moment."

... **telling them the consequences:** "Oof. That'll be a particularly tricky shot; you can Let Fly, but you'll have disadvantage on the roll." Or "If you get a 6-, you'll hit Caradoc instead."

... **both:** "You'll need to take time and line up the shot, and if you roll a 6-, you'll be hitting the hostage for sure."

If circumstances allow a character to attack multiple foes at once, they should roll to Let Fly once, but (on a 7+) roll damage separately for each target.

On a 7+, the PC launches their attack and deals their damage, but the damage roll (and the target's armor and HP) indicates how effective the attack was. If the damage is negligible, that probably means a grazing shot; if the damage is negated, then the shot bounced off the armor or the target evaded it.

Even when the damage is negated, most foes react to being shot (or shot at). Describe how the enemy reacts and consider **offering an opportunity**, either to the PC who Let Fly or someone else. Some enemies, though, are too tough or uncaring to flinch (even when they take a solid hit), and that's a nice, scary twist.

If the player rolls a 7-9 and chooses to let you place them in danger, that usually means that you make a soft move (one that provokes action) rather than a hard one (one that establishes badness). Warn them if picking this option will result in immediate consequences like taking damage.

If the player chooses to deplete their ammo, that could mean they took multiple shots or it could mean that they're starting to run low. If they pick this option, their ammo can't be recovered after the fight—it's lost or broken.

On a 6-, you get to decide what happens and it's almost certainly bad. Don't assume that their shot misses! They might get interrupted before taking the shot, or they might take the shot (and even hit) but something bad happens as a result. If an ally or bystander was nearby, they might hit them instead.

Rhianna rolls to her knees and sees that the feathered drake has just sliced Gareth open. "I notch, draw, and shoot it," she says.

*"Vahid's right there," I say. "You shoot and miss, you'll hit him. You still take the shot?" I'm **telling the consequences and asking**. She shoots, and gets a 10, but does only 2 damage. With the drake's 1 Armor, it's just a scratch. "But the good news is that you got its attention. It looks up from Gareth and hisses. Vahid, you're right there, what do you do?"*

The nailadd is about to pounce on Vahid, but Caradoc asks if he can throw his spear at it. "Sure," I say. "Roll to Let Fly."

Caradoc rolls a 7. "I'll move to get the shot, putting myself in danger." He does 4 damage, enough to hurt to spider but not drop it.

"Your spear thunks into it, but it turns and leaps on you instead, doing 6 damage and tackling you to the ground."

"Really? I don't get to, like, dodge?"

"Yeah, yeah. You're right. Sorry. It's leaping at you, what do you do?"

The PCs are behind a fallen tree, with three Hillfolk up on a ridge, shooting at them. Rhianna motions to her crew, who notch arrows, draw, and take turns popping up and shooting back. "Let Fly?"

"Eh," I say. "Between the high ground and their cover, I don't think you've got a realistic chance of hitting them. This might make them duck, giving you a chance to move. But that'd be Defying Danger, not Let Fly."

Special Moves

These moves are always in play, but they either affect other moves or are triggered by very specific circumstances.

ADVANTAGE/DISADVANTAGE

When you *make a roll with advantage*, roll an extra die and discard the lowest result.

When you *make a roll with disadvantage*, roll an extra die and discard the highest result.

When you *make a roll with both advantage and disadvantage*, they cancel each other out.

If you *have advantage/disadvantage on a damage roll*, roll the main die twice and discard the lower/higher result. Then add any bonus dice that apply.

Advantage usually means: roll 3d6 and keep the two highest dice. Disadvantage usually means: roll 3d6 and keeping the two lowest dice. If there's a tie for lowest or highest, discard one of them; it doesn't matter which.

For damage rolls, advantage/disadvantage apply only to the “main” die. If a player gets any bonus damage dice, those dice get added after you pick the highest/lowest die. For example, the Heavy (who has advantage when they deal damage) rolls a 10+ to Clash, and chooses to strike hard and fast for +1d6 damage. They roll 2d10, deal damage equal to the highest of those two dice, and deal +1d6 damage on top of that.

Advantage/disadvantage don't “stack.” They're binary—either you have them, or you don't. For example, if someone Seeks Insight and gets a 7+, they get advantage on their next roll to act on the answer. If someone also Aids them on that roll, they can't get advantage again. They roll 3d6 and discard the lowest die.

If someone has both advantage and disadvantage on the same roll, the two cancel each other out and the roll is made normally. By default, it doesn't matter if you have multiple sources of advantage vs. a single source of disadvantage (or vice versa). But if you and your players really want to get into counting how many instances of advantage or disadvantage a player has, you can. It won't break the game, but it might slow it down.

Players might have advantage on a roll because...

- ... a move (like Aid or Seek Insight) says they do;
- ... some sort of equipment or arcana gives them advantage; or
- ... you **offer an opportunity** to make a particular roll with advantage (but see the sidebar on the opposite page).

Players might have disadvantage on a roll because...

- ... a move (like Interfere) says they do;
- ... they have marked a debility (see page **XX**) and roll one of the affected stats;
- ... some sort of equipment or arcana imposes disadvantage; or
- ... you **reveal a downside** or **tell them the consequences**, and it involves rolling with disadvantage (but see the sidebar on the opposite page).

Adjusting difficulty

In many RPGs, the GM routinely applies bonuses or penalties to player rolls to reflect the difficulty or ease of their tasks. In *Stonetop*, you can apply advantage or disadvantage “on the fly” to do the same thing, but do so sparingly—it undercuts the impact of moves, arcana, and debilities that specifically grant advantage or disadvantage.

If a character’s action seems particularly easy or difficult, consider these instead of advantage or disadvantage:

Are they even triggering a move?

Can you just say that they do it, or know it, or figure it out? “No, don’t Clash, just deal damage.” Or, can you just say “no” and **tell them the requirements** for making it work? “You can’t make that jump with all your gear, you’ll need to drop down to a light load first.”

Can you adjust the risks? If they have a strong position, make it clear that the risks are less. “Suffering his attack just means that he’ll get inside your guard.” If they’re in a desperate position, tell them just how bad it could get. “On a 7-9, you’ll have one last chance to catch the ledge, but on a 6- you’re rolling Death’s Door.”

Can you adjust the scope? If things are easy for the PC, let a single roll accomplish more, or reveal more, etc. If things are hard, break the action down into smaller moves, each of which can only accomplish part of their goal.

BURN BRIGHTLY

When you *have enough XP to Level Up* (6 + twice your current level), you may spend 2 XP after any roll to add +1 to that roll (maximum +1 per roll).

PCs can’t Level Up (see page **XX**) while on an expedition, which means they might end up accumulating surplus XP. This move lets them spend some of that XP to ensure success.

The fact that PCs can Burn Brightly helps slow the rate at which PCs can level up, and it helps prevent “double-leveling.” It also subtly tips things in the players’ favor once they’ve been in the field for a long time and suffered a number of setbacks.

Keep an eye out for players rolling 6s or 9s, and ask the player if they have enough XP to Burn Brightly. If they have enough, they’ll probably do it.

Players will most often Burn Brightly when they roll 2d6 for a move, but they can use it on any roll—including damage rolls or even the Die of Fate.

Player Moves

END OF SESSION

When a *session ends*, point out how you demonstrated or struggled with your instinct. If you can, mark XP.

Say how your relationship with or opinion of a PC, NPC, or group has changed. If you can, mark XP.

Answer these questions as a group. For each “yes,” everyone marks XP.

- Did we learn more about the world or its history?
- Did we defeat a threat to Stonetop or the region?
- Did we improve our standing with our neighbors?
- Did we make a lasting improvement to Stonetop, or tangible progress towards doing so?

Praise something about the session (in the fiction or around the table) that you enjoyed or appreciated.

Finally, offer up a wish for future sessions: more __, less __, a chance to __, handling __ in a different way, etc. Wishes can be about what happens in the fiction or around the table. The GM will take notes.

The End of Session move is a ritual. It helps your group reflect on the session and improve your game.

Players can point out any moment where their PC’s instinct was reflected in play, for good or for ill, intentionally or not. If no one objects, the player marks XP. (Max 1 XP per session, even if their instinct came up more than once.)

Each player can then note how things have changed between them and someone else. The change need not be reciprocal, or even rational, but it should feel genuine. If no one objects, the player marks XP. (Max 1 XP per session, even if multiple relations changed.)

Other players can offer suggestions, ask questions, or challenge assertions. The goal is for everyone to reflect on the session, and to reward players for getting into character; the goal isn’t to wheedle for XP.

For the four questions, discuss them as a group. Everyone (including you, the GM) has to agree that a question is answered “yes.” If anyone dissents, no XP for that question. It’s good to ask for specific examples of each “yes,” just to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

After answering the questions, each player (including you, the GM) should point out something they liked: a player’s clever idea, a bit of roleplaying, the lack of fights, learning where the Forest Folk went, when Bob called “time out” and checked in with everyone, etc.

Lastly, each player (including you) should offer a wish for future sessions. Wishes might express...

- ... a player’s hopes for what happens (“I’d like a chance to take down Ifan”);
- ... a request for specific scenes (“I’d love to see Caradoc and Andras bond a bit”);
- ... a desire to do things differently (“Can we try to speak in-character more?”);
- ... feedback on your GMing (“I’d like more detail about our surroundings when fights break out”); and/or
- ... or anything else about the game, really.

Take notes, ask for clarification, and do your best to make those wishes come true.

DEATH'S DOOR

When you *are dying*, you glimpse the Last Door and the Lady of Crows (describe them). Then, roll +nothing: **on a 10+**, you wrest yourself back to the realm of the living—return to 1 HP but say how your brush with death has marked you; **on a 7-9**, the Lady waves you off—you're no longer dying but you're out of the action; **on a 6-**, your time has come—choose 1:

- ⊙ Make one last move as if you rolled a 12+, then step through the Last Door
- ⊙ Refuse to go; gain the Revenant or Ghost insert
- ⊙ Call on one of the Things Below by name and beseech it to intercede; gain the Thrall insert

This move is discussed in detail in the next chapter, Harm and Healing. See page **XX**.

Other player moves

Other player moves are discussed in detail elsewhere:

Follower moves

- ⊙ Order Followers (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Strengthen a Bond (page **XX**)

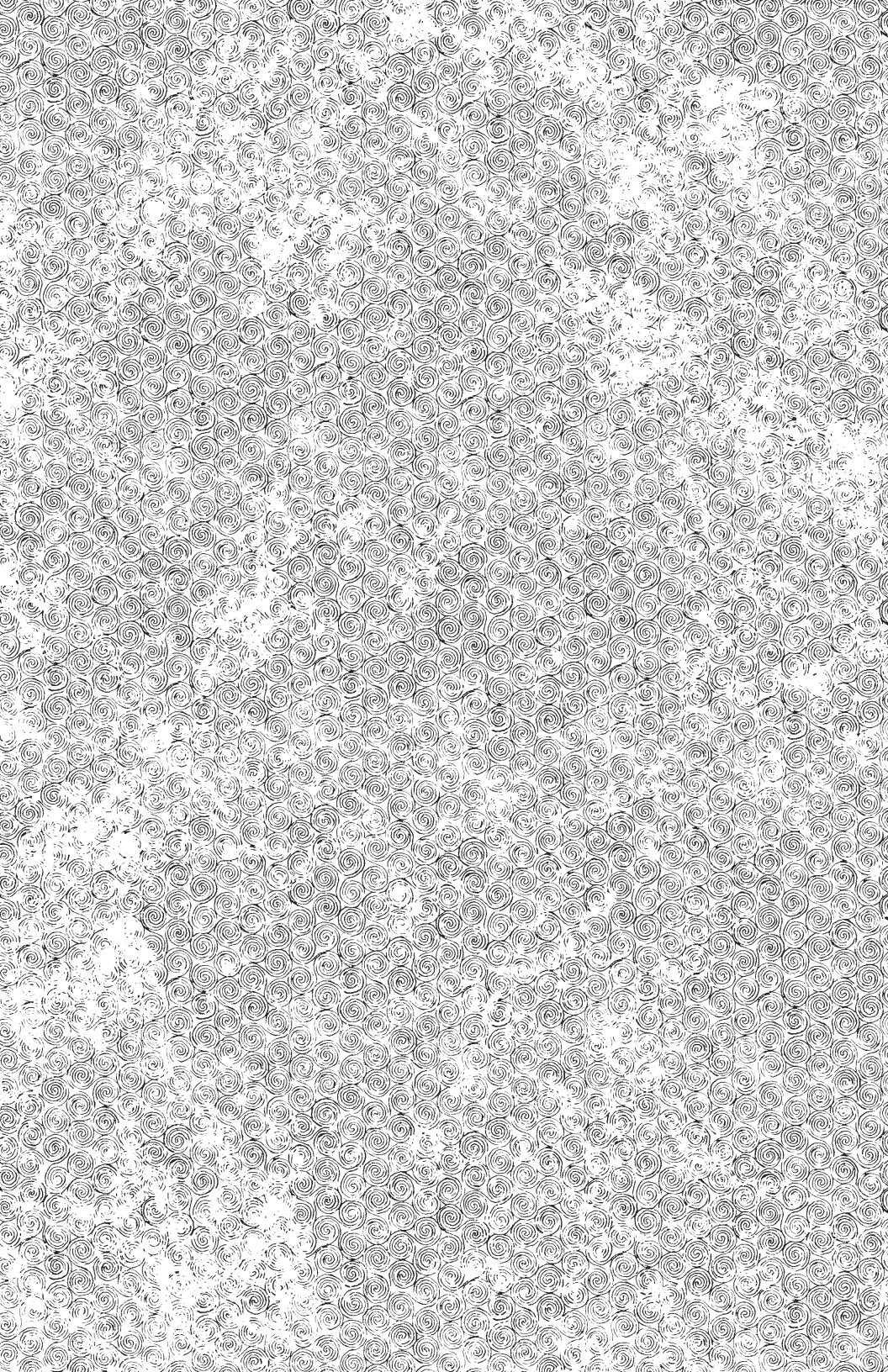
Expedition moves

- ⊙ Chart a Course (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Outfit (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Requisition (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Have What You Need (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Recover (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Forage (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Keep Company (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Make Camp (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Struggle as One (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Return Triumphant (page **XX**)

Homefront moves

- ⊙ Bolster (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Deploy (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Level Up (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Make a Plan (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Meet With Disaster (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Muster (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Pull Together (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Seasons Change (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Trade and Barter (page **XX**)

If a character does something that could meet the trigger for more than one player move, use which ever one seems most applicable to the current situation. In general, a more-specific move takes precedence over a more-general move, and everything takes precedence over Defy Danger. Discuss it with your players and come to a consensus if you can, or make a call if you can't.



Harm & Healing



Hit points and damage

Debilities

Problematic wounds

Death and dying

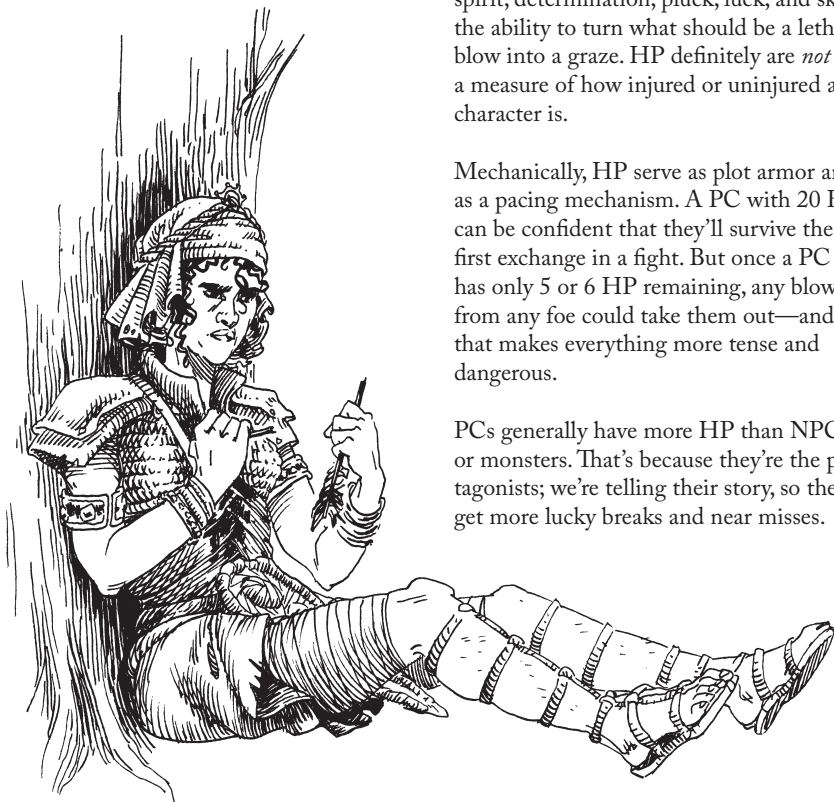
Healing and recovery

Player characters and their followers often find themselves in danger, exposed to injury and harm. Seeing them get hurt and then seeing how they deal with it is a big part of **playing to find out what happens**.

There are basically four types of harm that a character can suffer:

- ⊙ Damage to their Hit Points (HP)
- ⊙ Debilities
- ⊙ Fictionally problematic wounds
- ⊙ Death or a lethal wound

Any time a character (PC or NPC) is hurt in the fiction, they suffer some or all of these types of harm. Each affects a character in different ways.



Hits points and damage

Every character (PC, NPC, and monster) has Hit Points (HP). When a character gets hurt, knocked around, roughed up, or otherwise takes abuse, they lose HP. This is called “taking damage,” when you do it to someone else, it’s called “dealing damage.” When someone is reduced to 0 HP, they are out of the action and quite possibly dead or dying.

HP are a game element: they don’t represent any one particular thing in the fiction. They’re a combination of fighting spirit, determination, pluck, luck, and skill; the ability to turn what should be a lethal blow into a graze. HP definitely are *not* a measure of how injured or uninjured a character is.

Mechanically, HP serve as plot armor and as a pacing mechanism. A PC with 20 HP can be confident that they’ll survive the first exchange in a fight. But once a PC has only 5 or 6 HP remaining, any blow from any foe could take them out—and that makes everything more tense and dangerous.

PCs generally have more HP than NPCs or monsters. That’s because they’re the protagonists; we’re telling their story, so they get more lucky breaks and near misses.

Damage

Taking damage means losing HP, potentially being taken out of the action. A character takes damage when...

- ... a player-facing move specifically says that they do;
- ... you **hurt them** (they take damage along with the fictional hurt);
- ... you **use up their resources**, and HP are the resource you use up; or
- ... you make any GM move that involves them getting hit, knocked around, roughed up, suffering pain, etc.

If you make a GM move and that move could theoretically kill, disable, or knock out a normal person, then deal damage as well. Dealing damage should almost never be your move, but it will often be *part* of your move.

How much damage?

If the source of the damage is a prepared danger (see page **XX**), use the danger's stats. For example, if your move is to have a hagr pluck a PC up from the ground and start choking them, then you'd deal the hagr's 1d10+3 damage.

When multiple combatants deal damage at the same time, roll the single highest damage die among them and add +1 for each additional combatant. The tags from all the combatants apply. So if six coedwig (thorn-spirits, dealing d6 damage, 1 piercing) and a bidwraig (tree spirit, d8+3 damage, *forceful*) all pound on the Heavy at once, the Heavy is taking is d8+9 damage (1 piercing, *forceful*)—and probably having a very bad day.

If the damage isn't associated with a prepared danger, then ask yourself what it could likely do to a normal person. If the worst it's likely to do is...

- ... cause bruises and scrapes, pain, or light burns, it inflicts d4 damage.
- ... cause nasty flesh wounds, bruises, or burns, it inflicts d6 damage.
- ... break bones, cause deep/wide burns, or debilitate with pain, it inflicts d8 damage.
- ... cause death or dismemberment, it inflicts d10 damage.

Armor

Subtract the victim's armor rating from the damage they take. This can reduce the damage to 0, meaning they don't lose any HP. Good for them! They still got hit/tossed around/whatever, but it hasn't used up any of their vitality, luck, or plot armor.

If the attack has the “[*x*] piercing” tag, ignore [*x*] points of armor for that attack. So, if you deal 5 damage (1 piercing) and the target has 2 armor, their armor is effectively only 1 for that attack; they lose 4 HP (but their armor value is still 2 against future attacks).

If the attack “ignores armor,” then the armor doesn't apply. They take the full damage. Apply this tag on the fly when the fiction dictates: chainmail doesn't help when you're engulfed in flames, and no amount of physical armor protects you from a psychic assault.

A handful of player-facing moves tell the player to “lose [*x*] HP” (as opposed to “take [*x*] damage”). Armor never applies to this sort of HP loss.

Harm & Healing

Taking damage

When a character takes damage, they reduce their current HP by that amount. If they are reduced to 0 HP, then they are out of the action.

When a player character is reduced to 0 HP and the source of the damage was potentially lethal, then the PC is at Death's Door and makes that move accordingly (see page XX). **If the source of damage isn't likely to kill anyone**, then the PC is simply out of the action: unconscious, gasping for breath, panicking, trapped, etc. Consider asking the player how or why they're taken out. A character disabled this way can't save themselves; they remain disabled until someone helps them, or until you say otherwise.

When an NPC or monster is reduced to 0 HP, their fate is in your hands. If the source of damage was potentially lethal, then they're probably dead or will be soon. Otherwise, they're out of the action and no longer in the fight, but you get to say how. Remember, though: it's not your job to protect your NPCs or monsters. **Let things burn.**

Followers (see page XX) are NPCs, so you get to decide what happens to them at 0 HP. You can, however, choose to have the player roll Death's Door for them.

If you **hurt them**, then the lost HP are part of the fictional harm. Otherwise, taking damage means scratches and bruises, sore muscles, rattled teeth, cut lips and bleeding noses, loss of breath, dizziness, pain and weariness and fatigue. It's the wear and tear that grinds someone down but doesn't take them out of a fight.

Regaining hit points

A PC or follower regains HP when...

- ... they Recover (see page XX);
- ... they Make Camp, and choose to regain HP;
- ... they're at Death's Door and roll a 10+;
- ... they have a few days of downtime and Convalesce;
- ... another move says that they do; or
- ... you **offer them an opportunity** to regain HP and they take it.

Non-follower NPCs and monsters regain HP when you decide that they do. Use the player moves as guidelines: a few minutes of rest and access to supplies will restore 3-5 HP; a night's rest will restore HP equal to half their maximum; a few days of rest and recovery will restore them to full HP. The fiction, of course, takes precedence. A supernaturally tough and resilient creature might restore its HP more quickly; a magical construct might not regain HP unless someone or something repairs or recharges it.

Remember, HP aren't "meat points." Regaining HP doesn't mean that wounds have closed or bones have knitted; it means they've grown accustomed to the pain, gotten the bleeding to stop, caught their breath. The injuries are still there until they heal. It's just that the character has more fight back in them, and is once again further away from a lethal blow.

Debilities

Player characters can suffer up to three different debilities:

- ⊙ **Weakened:** the character is fatigued, tired, sluggish, shaky. They suffer disadvantage when rolling +STR or +DEX.
- ⊙ **Dazed:** the character is out of it, befuddled, not thinking clearly. They suffer disadvantage when rolling +INT or +WIS.
- ⊙ **Miserable:** the character is greatly distressed, grumpy or angry, unwell, in pain. They suffer disadvantage when rolling +CON or +CHA.

In addition to the mechanical penalty, debilities have fictional consequences. A *miserable* character is miserable, and you should weave that into your descriptions and you GM moves. A debility might mean that someone has to Defy Danger when they otherwise wouldn't need to.

Marking Debilities

Players mark debilities on the character sheets to indicate that their character suffers from them. Player characters might mark a debility because...

- ... they trigger a player move, and that move says that they mark a debility;
- ... you hurt them, and the harm you inflict includes them marking a debility;
- ... you demonstrate a downside, or offer an opportunity with a cost, or tell them the consequences, and the downside/cost/consequence is them marking a debility; or
- ... you make any other GM move that involves them becoming *weakened*, *dazed*, or *miserable*, and have them mark that debility.

In other words: marking debilities is both prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive: a move says they mark the debility, and they then suffer that condition in the fiction. Descriptive: something happens in the fiction that would leave the character *weakened*, or *dazed*, or *miserable*, and thus the character marks the debility and suffers the mechanical penalty.

If a move tells the player to “mark a debility,” they can choose the debility to mark. Ask them what that looks like in the fiction. The Lightbearer’s invocation leaves them *miserable*? Why that debility? What are the symptoms? What does this look like to everyone else?

If a move causes a player to mark a specific debility, and it’s already marked, then they caught a break. Maybe the condition gets a little worse in the fiction, but the mechanical penalty stays the same. If marking the specific debility is an optional choice, and it’s already marked, then they can’t choose that option.

If a move requires that a PC marks a debility as part of its trigger, and the debility is already marked, then they can’t trigger the move. For example, if the Heavy already has all three debilities marked, they can’t trigger Unfettered.

Harm & Healing

Clearing debilities

A player character can clear a debility when...

- ... they Recover, and explain how they're treating the debility (see page **XX**).
- ... they Make Camp, and choose to clear a debility.
- ... they have a few days of downtime and Convalesce.
- ... some other player move says they do.
- ... you offer them an opportunity to clear a debility, and they take it.

Clearing a debility means: they erase the mark on their character sheet, they no longer take the mechanical penalty, and their character is no longer actively distressed by the effects in the fiction.

Clearing a debility doesn't mean that any accompanying injury is healed—it means they've treated it as best they can and it's no longer actively hindering them. If they marked *weakened* because of a torn bicep, clearing the debility probably means it's bandaged and the arm is in a sling. It'll still take time to fully heal.

NPCs, monsters, and debilities

Monsters and NPCs don't mark debilities, and player-facing moves never allow PCs to inflict them on NPCs or monsters.

Monsters and most NPCs don't roll for moves, so suffering disadvantage on two stats doesn't make any sense.

So: if a monster suffers an effect that would leave them weakened, they don't mark weakened—you just describe them as being slower or shaky. Maybe you **offer the PCs an opportunity** as a result?

Followers (page **XX**) can trigger player moves. If you want, assign a debility to a follower as a temporary tag (*weakened*, *dazed*, or *miserable*), imposing disadvantage on any relevant rolls. But mostly, you should reflect a follower's current state in how you portray them, and how they act, and what they're capable of or willing to do.



Problematic wounds

A problematic wound is one with lasting fictional consequences. Characters suffer them when you **hurt them** or make another GM move that involves a character getting hurt in a specific, consequential way. Simply describe the wound in the fiction. It's now true! A twisted ankle can't bear weight. A blow to the head leaves them staggering and dizzy. A severed hand is severed, and they're probably bleeding out (and in shock). These sorts of problematic wounds should be particularly common when *messy* attacks are involved.

Problematic wounds often involve PCs marking debilities and always involve taking damage (i.e. losing HP). If an NPC breaks a PC's fingers, the PC can't make a fist, is probably *weakened* or *dazed* or *miserable* from the pain, and is going to take 1d8 damage (ignores armor). The damage won't kill them if they drop to 0 HP, but it could take them out of the action.



How do you decide?

The PCs have just suffered an attack, ignored a threat, or rolled a 6- and you think you're going to do harm. Do you deal damage? Do you have them mark a debility? Do you inflict a problematic wound and if so, how bad do you make it?

There's no hard-and-fast rule, but you should follow your principles and make a GM move that flows from the fiction. Often, you'll pick a GM move (like **put them in a spot** or a monster move like **bash prey to the ground, senseless**), and the specific fiction of your move means that they also take damage or mark a debility.

Other times, you'll know that you want to do something harmful, but won't have a specific move in mind. In that case, have the player roll the damage taken and let that inform the nature and severity of your move. See page **XX** for more guidance.

Keep in mind the tags of the attacks involved. *Messy* attacks are especially destructive, and should often **hurt them** or **use up their resources** (destroying shields, weapons, or gear). *Forceful* attacks knock victims around; even if they do no damage, they should still change the momentum or positioning of the fight.

When the PCs or followers deal damage to monsters, use the description of their attack, the amount of damage dealt, how many HP the foe has left, and the tags on the attack to inform the fictional results.



Announce trouble (future or offscreen):

"Andras is white as a sheet, and that snake bite is red and swollen and you see angry red lines following his veins up his arm. What do you do?"

Reveal an unwelcome truth:

"Oof. Yeah, Blodwen, you peel the bandages back from Geralt's wound, and... it's not good. It smells bad, the flesh is kind of black, and there's a greenish pus. It's infected, and it's going to get worse. What do you do?"

Put someone in a spot:

"It claws at your face before you hurl it away. Take d6 damage. You're still up? Okay, I think it gashed your forehead and blood starts pouring into your eyes. You can't really see, but you hear it scuffling about, getting ready to pounce again. What do you do?"

Problematic wounds in play

Incorporate problematic wounds into the fiction and into your GM moves. When a player rolls a 7-9 or a 6-, maybe use the problematic wound to justify the result. Use your moves to bring an injury to the forefront of the story or to have it complicate the situation.

Use up their resources: *"You make it up and out of that gully, but the wound in your side is still bleeding. You get a wave of dizziness as you stand. It passes, but take another 1d6 damage, ignoring armor. You still up?"*

Demonstrate a downside: *(after rolling a 7-9 to Defy Danger and escape from a hagr) "Like you said... you duck under the log as he swings it and rush past him before he can recover. But about five strides away, your knee buckles and you collapse to the ground. It's that injury from earlier. Your knee is just this burning mass of pain, and you hear the hagr grunt and pull the log free and start to lumber toward you, what do you do?"*

Tell them the consequences: *"You're just gushing blood. If you don't put a tourniquet on it soon, you're going to bleed out. Of course, your hands are shaking and everything feels numb. Mark Weakened if you haven't already, and you'll be Defying Danger to do anything involving fine motor control. What do you do?"*

Tell them the requirements: *"If you want to walk on that ankle, you'll need to splint it and find a cane or a crutch. And something to dull the pain would be good, too. What do you do?"*

Death and dying

When a PC is reduced to 0 HP by an attack that could kill them, they're dying and must make this move. They might also be dying because the fiction demands it: if they fall 100 feet onto rocks, they don't take damage, they're at 0 HP and on Death's Door.

DEATH'S DOOR

When you *are dying*, you glimpse the Last Door and the Lady of Crows (describe them). Then, roll +nothing: **on a 10+**, you wrest yourself back to the realm of the living—return to 1 HP but say how your brush with death has marked you; **on a 7-9**, the Lady waves you off—you're no longer dying but you're out of the action; **on a 6-**, your time has come—choose 1:

- ⊙ Make one last move as if you rolled a 12+, then step through the Last Door
- ⊙ Refuse to go; gain the Revenant or Ghost insert
- ⊙ Call on one of the Things Below by name and beseech it to intercede; gain the Thrall insert

If you like, you can hold off on resolving this move until the scene wraps up or the other PCs get a little spotlight. If someone tries to save the dying PC (tending to wounds, etc.), then they're Aiding the Death's Door roll. The “risks, costs, or consequences” they expose themselves to will depend largely on how they Aid, your table's take on the Lady of Crows, and the result of the roll.

The Lady of Crows and the Last Door are for you and your table to describe. They might even appear differently for different characters.

On a 10+, they're back in action and no longer dying, but they are marked in mind, body, or soul. The player decides how, but feel free to offer suggestions, like a nasty scar, a lost eye, visions of the Last Door, or a murder of crows, always nearby. Whatever they pick, bring the mark up often in play. Maybe even write it up as a threat (an affliction, see page **XX**).

On a 7-9+, the character is no longer dying but they're unconscious (or close enough) until you say otherwise.

On a 6-, their time has come and the sane thing to do is pass through the Last Door. They can make one last move, but after that they're dead. There's no saving them. They can't use that last move to avoid death. Only the rarest of magic can bring them back.

If they refuse to go, ask why. Have them look at the Ghost or Revenant inserts and pick their Terrible Purpose. If they can't tell you, they shouldn't pick this option.

To become a Thrall, the PC must know the name of a Thing Below. If none of the Things Below have come up in play, maybe the PC can Know Things before dying?

If the character “sticks around,” they are in for a steady downward progression, becoming more and more unstable and monstrous. Play up the horror. Show how their “lives” are no longer the same. Push their Terrible Purpose or Impulse into play. For a Ghost or Revenant, create their Terrible Purpose as an affliction; for a Thrall, create their master as a magical entity (see Threats, page **XX**). An undead PC should feel like they're on borrowed time—because they are. The other PCs should be wary of their undead ally. Wary, at the very least.

Healing and recovery

The following moves deal with regaining HP, clearing debilities, and treating or recovering from problematic wounds.

RECOVER

When you *take time to catch your breath and tend to what ails you*, expend 1 use of supplies and recover HP equal to 4+Prosperity. You can't gain this benefit again until you take more damage.

When you *tend to a debility or a problematic wound*, say how. The GM will either say that it's taken care of or tell you what's required to do so (Defying Danger, expending supplies or some other resource, finding ____, Making Camp, etc.).

As with any move: ask them what this looks like. Are they tending to wounds? Having a snack? Applying a poultice? Chewing on willow bark? What?

Often, multiple PCs will Recover at once. That's fine. It's a good time to **ask provocative questions** and encourage them to do a little role playing between themselves.

Each character who regains HP must expend 1 use of supplies, or someone else must expend a use on their behalf. The Steading's Prosperity directly affects the quality of those supplies and thus the number of HP recovered. A Steading with Prosperity +1 (*moderate*) can provide heartier fair and more potent herbs than a Steading with Prosperity +0 (*poor*).

Once a given character regains HP via Recover, they can't do so again until they take more damage. This means that a PC can't take like 12 points of damage and bounce back with a quick breather. (And if some doofus says "I'll just nick my arm for 1 HP and then Recover again," either tell them that they aren't losing any HP because it's a very controlled situation, or **hurt them** and make that cut a problematic wound with 1d6 damage that ignores armor.)

Remember, regaining HP does not mean healing wounds. Those bruises, scratches, etc. are still there.

For debilities and problematic wounds, prompt them to describe how they tend to the injury. If it sounds reasonable and effective, just say, "Cool, it's taken care of." But you can also tell them what else is required, such as...

- ... Knowing Things to know what to do;
- ... Defying Danger, the danger being...
 - ... the pain.
 - ... them thrashing as you work.
 - ... the wound/condition getting worse.
 - ... that ____ arrives/happens before you finish.
 - ... drawing the attention of ____
 - ... that you need to use up/use more ____;
- ... expending (more) supplies, whisky, etc.;
- ... finding ____ (an herb, the antivenom, fresh water, something to use as a stent, etc.);
- ... Making Camp/letting them rest; or
- ... doing something drastic (cauterizing, amputating, field surgery, etc.).

Combine these requirements with "and" and "or" as you see fit. If they meet the requirements, then the debility is cleared and/or the problematic wound is stabilized (though almost certainly not healed).

They've dispatched the bears in the cave but Caradoc got himself smacked around in the process. He's lost 9 HP and he's Dazed—he got swatted on his shield and slammed against the cave wall. He's out of breath and sore but I never established a specific injury.

While the others investigate the cave, Caradoc asks "Can I Recover?" Sure, but I ask what that looks like, what sort of supplies he's using. "I think I'll slump up against the cave wall, drop my shield and spear, take a few deep breathes. Maybe take a shot of whisky, and eat some flatbread." Cool! He marks off a use of supplies and regains 4 HP (the steading's Prosperity is currently 0). I also think that's sufficient to clear his Dazed debility, too.

He's still down 5 HP, and asks if he can Recover again. "Nope," I say. "Not until you take more damage."

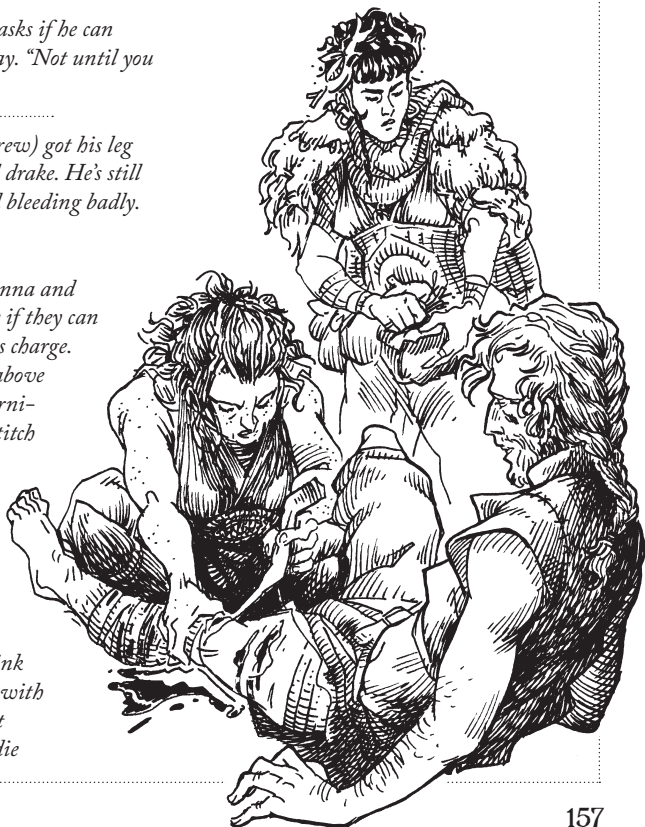
Geralt (one of Rhianna's crew) got his leg slashed open by a feathered drake. He's still conscious, but at 0 HP and bleeding badly. He won't last long.

The fight is over, and Rhianna and Blodwen rush over and see if they can save his life. Blodwen takes charge. "Rhianna, apply pressure above the wound. I'll make a tourniquet. Then, I don't know, stitch him up, I guess?"

She's tending to a problematic wound, which is one of the triggers for Recover. Looking at my list of possible requirements, I think that she's Defying Danger with INT, the danger being that Geralt will bleed out and die

before they can staunch the bleeding. Also, they'll need to expend a use of supplies for the tourniquet and stitches. "You do it?" I ask. She does, and reaches for the dice.

She rolls an 8 and I give her a choice between a cost and a lesser success. "You stop the bleeding and save his life, but he's in bad shape. You can spend a second use of supplies to keep him going with some sort of stimulant herb. He'll be awake with 4 HP and able to move about slowly, but he'll be in a lot of pain and likely to hurt himself again. Or you can leave him, stable but flitting in and out of consciousness, unable to walk on his own. What do you do?"



Harm & Healing

MAKE CAMP

When you *settle in to rest in an unsafe area*, answer the GM's questions about your campsite. Each member of the party must consume 1 use of supplies or provisions; if you use a ◇ mess kit (*requires fire & water*), then 1 use can provide for up to four people.

If you *eat and drink your fill*, and *get at least a few hours of sleep*, pick 1.

- ◎ Regain HP equal to ½ your max
- ◎ Clear a debility

If *your rest was particularly peaceful, comfortable, or enjoyable*, you also gain advantage on your next roll.

When the PCs are beaten up or exhausted, they'll want to Make Camp. If they have time, a ◇ mess kit, fire, and water, they can regain a lot of HP and/or clear some debilities with just 1-2 uses of supplies.

To make a choice, they need all three: food, drink, and sleep. Anyone who also uses a ◇ bedroll regains +1d6 HP, regardless of which choice they make.

Regaining HP or clearing a debility doesn't make problematic wounds go away. PCs must treat them with the Recover move, and such wounds take time to fully heal.

To get advantage on their next roll, things need to be *great*, not merely adequate. This should be the exception, not the rule.

For more about Making Camp, and how to decide on what (if anything) happens during the night, see page **XX**.

The party is en route to Marshedge and had an almost-disastrous encounter with the nosgolau as they camped near Titan Bones. They got Vahid back (barely) but he's dazed and weakened. He also took a lot of damage, and he's down to 6 of his 16 HP. Caradoc and Rhianna took some damage, too. Blodwen's just fine.

Once they make it back to camp, they all get a few hours of sleep. They ate and drank before the attack, so they each get to make a choice.

Blodwen's already at max HP and has no debilities. "Do I get advantage, then?" she asks. Nope! She might not be beaten up, but she's still sleeping on hard pave stones and huddled in a cloak.

Caradoc and Rhianna each opt to regain HP. Caradoc has 16 HP max, and he's got only 7 left. He regains 8 HP (half of his max) and ends up with 15 HP. He could Recover to get that last 1 HP back, but decides that it's not worth it. Rhianna has lost fewer than half her max HP, so she's back up to full.

Vahid has a tough choice: he can clear one of his debilities or he can recover HP. "How about I regain HP points from Making Camp, and then Recover to clear those debilities?" I ask how he's tends to the debilities. "Oh, I'll eat a huge meal, way more than it seems like I should be able to tuck away."

"Okay, let's say this, then. You'll regain half your max HP, bringing back up to 14. And if you eat 1 use of supplies, you can clear weakened. But you'll still be dazed until you Make Camp again and get some good sleep. Deal?"

CONVALESCENCE

When you *rest for a few days in safety and comfort*, set your HP back to your max and clear all your debilities. When you *rest for a few weeks under the care of a healer*, you heal any problematic wounds that can heal. If you *have suffered a permanent injury or impairment*, either retire or Make a Plan to adapt to it.

This move lets the PCs “reset” between expeditions. It’s an opportunity to let time pass and have the seasons change. It’s also a great time to ask questions and use your homefront moves. See page **XX** for ideas.

Convalescing will heal most wounds, but it can’t regrow lost limbs or repair a shattered knee. The character can either retire or Make a Plan and adapt.

If a PC retires, the player stops actively playing them. The character has lost the edge and nerve that makes them a PC. The player should make a new character, and the retired character becomes an NPC.

If the player wants their PC to adapt, then use the Make a Plan move (page **XX**) to clarify their goal and what’s required to reach it. This might involve something extraordinary (like getting a clockwork hand from the Ustrina) but usually it’s a matter of ingenuity, practice, and grit.

Don’t make the requirements unduly hard. Your job is to be a fan of the player characters and punctuate their lives with adventure. It is not to penalize them for getting hurt. You want to see these tough, determined, resourceful characters adapt to their setbacks. Give them a path to recovery and see how they handle it.

Rhianna lost her right arm at Three-Coven Lake (and she got off easy; Andras didn’t make it home at all). Some quick thinking saved her life, but she’s unsure how she’ll be an effective warrior and archer. She’s not about to retire, though.

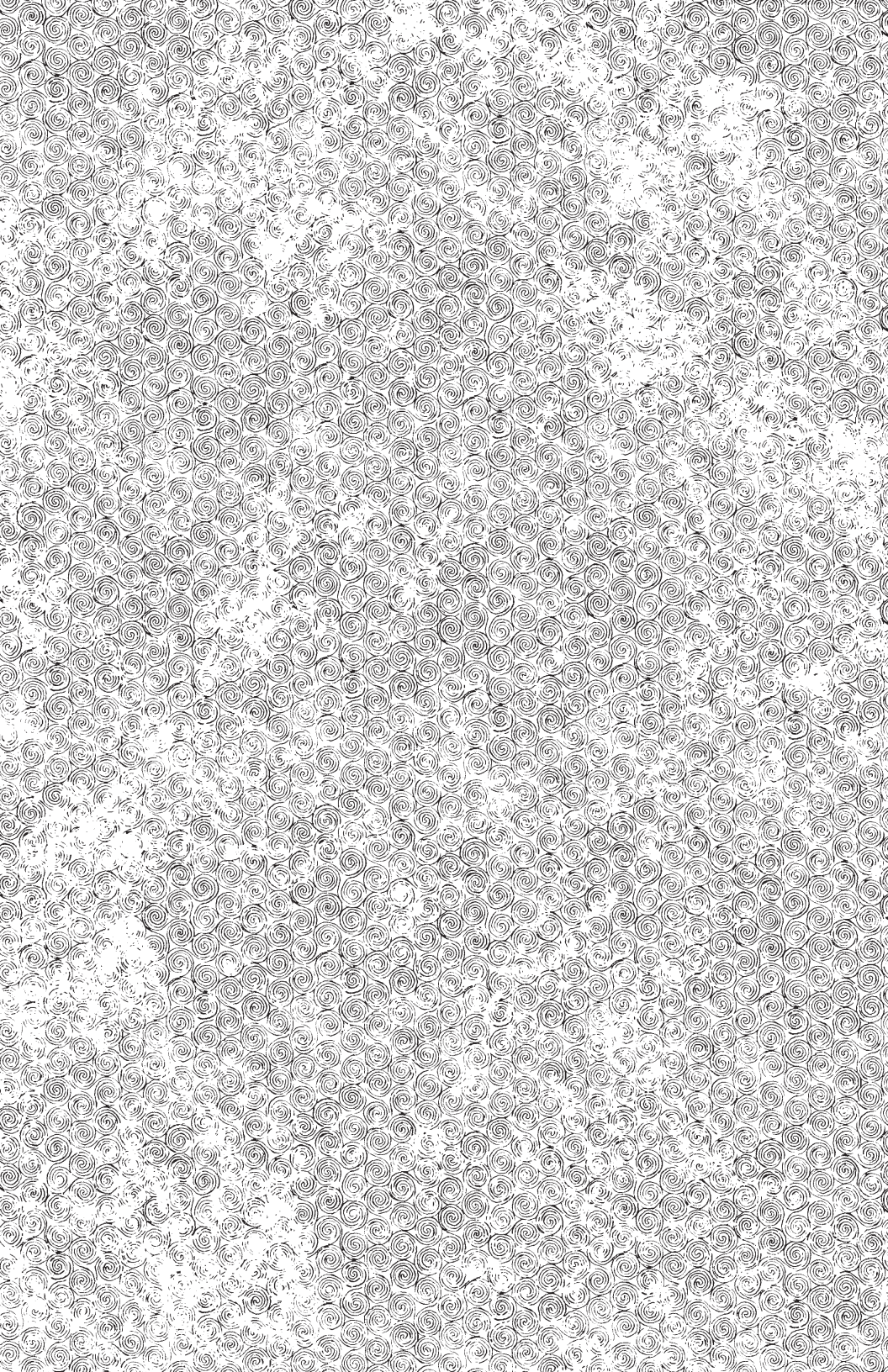
So, we Make a Plan. “What do you hope to accomplish? Are you looking to replace or regrow the arm through magic? Or learn to shoot one-handed?” Rhianna’s practical to a fault, and doesn’t even consider a magical option. I look at the list of possible requirements, and write down:

- You must design and make some prosthetic or device for drawing & releasing a bow one-handed
- You must learn to use the device
- It’ll take months of practice

We decide that a leather mouth-bit attached to the bowstring would let her pull and release. It’s a simple thing to make with help from Sawyl the tanner.

Later, I frame a scene with Rhianna practicing her new setup. I ask what it looks like, what she’s struggling with. Then Andras’s mom comes by and thanks Rhianna for taking him under her wing, saying how proud she was to have Andras protecting the village. Rhianna’s left feeling all sorts of bitter over losing him in search of Vahid’s damn fire-jewel.

Autumn comes before Rhianna’s had the months of practice she needs, and the PCs end up hunting a dark presence that’s been stalking the Wood. “For now,” I say, “your bow will have the reload tag and you’ll Let Fly with disadvantage. But once you get another month of practice, you’ll shoot and Let Fly without penalty.”



First Adventure



Goals

Structure

Background

Setup questions

Setting the scene

Dropping the hook

Heading out

Goals

Introductions are complete. Spring has sprung forth. You've got a rich tapestry of characters, relationships, and backstories. It's time for the first adventure! Let's put all that stuff into play and see the PCs in action.

You've got two broad options for the first adventure: use an adventure starter, or make something up entirely (more on that later).

Either way, your goals for the first adventure are:

- ⊗ Paint a picture of daily life
- ⊗ Explore relationships
- ⊗ Identify what's important to them
- ⊗ Push them into the field
- ⊗ Establish details, but leave blanks
- ⊗ Play up both the mundane and the mysterious
- ⊗ Draw them back home

Paint a picture of daily life

Your first adventure should start in Stone-top and help make it real. The setup and the initial scenes should show off mundane slices of life and reinforce the fact that this is the PCs' home—and that it's a home worth fighting for.

Explore relationships

Take those NPCs and relationships that were established during introductions and push them into the spotlight. How does Vahid treat his betrothed? How does Blodwen feel about Rhianna's promise to keep her safe?

Don't just explore relationships that were explicitly established during introductions; explore the relationships they imply, too! Rhianna promised Blodwen's sister, Mare, that she'd keep Blodwen safe? Well, what's the relationship between Mare and Rhianna? Between Mare and Blodwen? Keep an eye out for surprises, too! It might not have come up during introductions, but maybe when you play Gareth (one of Rhianna's crew), you find that he's flirting with Blodwen. That's great! Run with it and see where that goes.

Identify what's important to them

There's nothing like a crisis to make someone's priorities come to the forefront. Keep an eye on the decisions that characters make, and where their interests lie. That'll be all sorts of fodder for later.

Push them into the field

Whatever you do, don't spend very long in Stonetop itself. Get them into the field, on an adventure, as soon as possible.

"Wait, what?" you might be thinking. "We just spent all that time establishing the village... aren't we going to DO something with it?"

Yes, you are—just not right now. Right now, your job is to get the action rolling and **punctuate their lives with adventure**. The village and its inhabitants are the backdrop for that adventure, the motivation for it, but (at least to start), they shouldn't be focus of it.

Apocalypse World and related games (like *Sagas of the Icelanders* and *Monsterhearts*) tell you to spend the first session just following the PCs around, establishing NPCs with incompatible interests and untenable arrangements. If you do that with *Stonetop*, the PCs will soon have the blood of their fellow villagers on their hands. And that's going to lead to a very different type of game.

No: get them out of town. Get them adventuring on the town's behalf, sweating and bleeding for their kith and kin. Don't let Stonetop itself be a major source of conflict—yet.

Establish details, leave blanks

Both in the village and in the wider world, you want to be asking questions like crazy and establishing all sorts of concrete details. Who lives in those houses just outside the ringwall? What flowers grow all around the old fae waystones? Where did Vahid get that fancy lantern?

But leave blanks, too. Leave some details to wonder about, some mysteries to fill in later. How did the Silent Twins die? What is hiding in the Maw? Why *is* Elios such a joyless prick?

Play up both the mundane and the mysterious

Stonetop adventures should include a healthy dose of both mundane concerns and mysterious elements. If the adventure hook is mundane (like a chance to capture some wild horses), lace the adventure with strangeness and magic. If the hook is mysterious, pay attention to mundane details like weather and supplies and the fact that someone's mother is worried sick.

Draw them back home

Whatever the first adventure is, it should end with them returning to Stonetop. This should happen pretty naturally, but avoid things like trapping the whole party in some fae's demesne or having them follow a bunch of slavers to Lygos. Let them go home. Encourage them to go home. The whole premise of the game falls apart if they don't.

Structure

Regardless of whether you use an adventure starter or a custom adventure, the first adventure will generally follow this structure in play:

- 1) Start with the **setup**, in which you ask a bunch of loaded questions that provide context and establish motivation. This might include a “love letter” or two (see page **XX**).
- 2) Then **set the scene**, zooming in on a particular place and time in the village. You’ll frame the scene, ask more questions, and make some homefront moves that show off the town and explore relationships.
- 3) Once the scene is established, **drop the hook**. Shows signs of trouble, reveal an unwelcome truth, offer an opportunity, tell them the consequences, etc. Spend a little time seeing how the PCs and NPCs react.
- 4) Assuming the PCs take the hook, they’ll **make preparations**: they’ll Chart a Course, Outfit, Requisition, and recruit followers to join them.
- 5) They will likely **travel** towards the focal point of the adventure. The journey will likely be an adventure itself. They might even be forced to turn back, letting the opportunity slip away or the problem get worse.
- 6) The journey (probably) leads them to the **resolution** of the adventure: the danger or opportunity that spurred them out the door in the first place. They explore, talk to NPCs, sneak, fight, make a daring escape, etc.

Adventure starters

Adventure starters are pre-made first adventures that you can use to kickstart your game. You can make characters and jump into the first adventure all in one session!

With that said: adventure starters bypass the full introduction process described in the Getting Started chapter. Starters include their own abbreviated setup procedures, and delay establishing a lot of details about the village and the world until after the first adventure is complete.

Even if you don’t use an adventure starter in full, you might find them useful as examples and sources of threats, dangers, discoveries, and maps.

You can find these adventure starters at www.lampblack-and-brimstone.com.

- 7) Then there’s the **aftermath**: the journey home, the triumphant (or not-so) return, the reactions of their friends, family, and neighbors, and a return to day-to-day life. But there will be questions unanswered, threats still at large, further opportunities to explore—the source of future adventures!

Of course, the PCs might not take your hook. Or, they might get distracted by something that happens on the journey, and decide its more important than whatever you expected the focal point to be. That’s all fine! Follow your agenda and principles, make moves, and keep asking them what they do.

Background

A good first adventure requires preparation. At the very least, you should:

- ⊙ Identify the central threat or opportunity
- ⊙ Write up your threat(s)
- ⊙ Plan your hook

Having this information planned in advance helps you portray a rich and mysterious world. You could theoretically ad lib the threat and hook, asking the characters questions to fill in the blanks. But you'll end up with a much more cohesive, textured, and thematic adventure if you prepare this information in advance.

During introductions, the group kept focusing on the recent crinwin raids, the abducted children, and effects this has had on town.

Vahid rolled the seasons change roll and got a 7, choosing "unexpected bounty." But there's also a threat that will emerge or make itself worse.

I've got a lot to work with. Let's see where this goes!

Identify the central threat or opportunity

The first adventure will center around an opportunity or a threat. The "spring breaks forth" roll (and the player's choice) at the end of introductions will tell you which.

On a 10+, an opportunity

If they rolled a 10+ on their Seasons Change roll, they will have chosen "interesting news" or "valuable insight" or "trade opportunity." All three choices represent an opportunity. The opportunity should be both...

- ... external, so as to get the PCs out of the steading, but also...
- ... nearby, within a few days of Stonetop, so that they can get there and back with a modest amount of rations.

If they chose "interesting news", then pick (or ask the players to pick):

- ⊙ A steading improvement and one of its requirements; or...
- ⊙ some other goal the players established during introductions (solving a mystery, finding a treasure, mastering an arcana, etc.).

Now, think of something that would put that requirement or goal in reach, and how the PCs could learn of the opportunity.

Vahid is keen to pursue "The Stream, Diverted" improvement. One possible requirement is inventing a way to make water flow uphill. Had he rolled a 10+ on Seasons Change and chosen "interesting news," I'd have tied the opportunity relate to that.

What could put this in reach? Well, the Ruined Tower has all those old pipes and an underground reservoir. Vahid could study that stuff and learn how to make a pump. How could he hear of it? A shady treasure hunter might show up in town, having explored the Ruined Tower and seen pipes pumping water from the ground! He'll show Vahid, for a price...

First Adventure

If they chose “valuable insight”, then pick a threat that came up during introductions. If nothing stands out, ask the player who rolled what they’re most worried about. Think about that threat. Why haven’t they done something about it before now? What information would allow them to address it (a vulnerability, the location of its lair, its motives, etc.)? Pick something the PCs can act on, fill in the details, and think about how that could be revealed to the PCs.

The obvious threat that came up during introductions was the crinwin—they raided the town just a few weeks ago and one of the town’s youth went missing in the raid.

Why hasn’t anything been done about the crinwin? Well, they’re stealthy, vicious things living in the Great Wood—it’d be foolish to try to track them down. What info would let the PCs address the threat? The location of their lair! Maybe a hunter could spot some crinwin and be brave enough to track them to their lair.

If they chose “trade opportunity”, pick (or ask the players to pick) one of the following:

- ⊙ Something from the Special Items list that would benefit the whole town (like another horse, a pair of donkeys, etc.).
- ⊙ Something of powerful symbolic value (like a suit of steel armor bearing Aratis’s symbol).
- ⊙ A minor arcana of some utility, or something that would help unlock the secrets of a major arcanum.
- ⊙ A mundane item made of exotic material (like a chest carved from dark ice). Now, who could offer such a thing? What would they want in exchange? And why are they offering it to Stonetop instead of someone else?

Vahid wants to find the intricate helm that would serve as the Mindgem’s head. Had he rolled a 10+, he might have asked for an opportunity to acquire it. The Ustrina could have found it and sold it to someone in Gordin’s Delve, someone who knows Vahid is interested in this sort of thing. Of course, they’d ask a pretty penny for it, or more likely, some service only Vahid could grant...

On a 7-9, a threat and a gain

If they rolled a 7-9, then a threat to the steading presents itself (or gets worse). But they also will have chosen a seasonal gain. The threat will be the main focus of the first adventure, but how it presents itself should be influenced by whatever seasonal gain they chose.

As you design the threat, be sure to make it...

- ... **external**, so as to get the PCs out of the steading; but...
- ... **nearby**, within a few days of Stonetop, so that they can get there and back with a modest amount of supplies;
- ... **Stonetop’s problem**, something that directly threatens the villagers and that no one else will deal with; and
- ... **urgent**, something that will get worse if not addressed.

Pick a threat that came up during introductions, or something new that strikes your fancy (from the setting guide, or from your own fevered imagination). Ask yourself: why has this become a problem now? Why wasn’t it a problem before, and what changed to make it a problem? Try to tie the reason to some of the details that came up during introductions.

During introductions, Rhianna's war story was about a nighttime raid by the crinwin, just a few weeks ago, and how they tried to drag kids off into the Wood. Caradoc was supposed to be watching after Wynfor, but he left Wynfor alone so he could go "prove" himself in the battle. When things settled down, Wynfor was missing. The search party never found anything. And on top of all that, Rhianna is worried that something is driving the crinwin, making them bolder and more organized. The crinwin will clearly be the threat.

So, why have the crinwin become so bold of late? I'm thinking they have fallen under the sway of a swyn (a big, arrogant, hypnotic, monkey-headed serpent). During the raid, they were trying to kidnap children with specific traits to add to the swyn's "collection." The swyn recently moved into (or emerged from?) an old Maker-ruin, not too far from town.

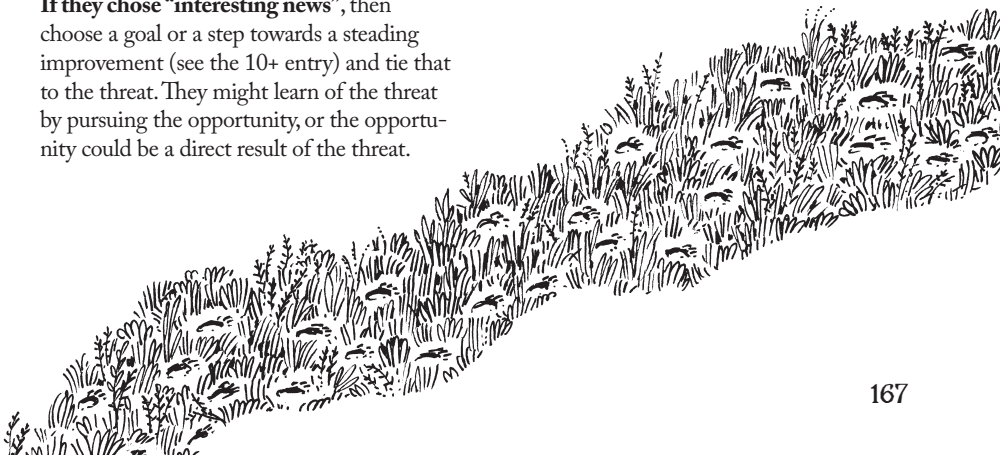
After deciding on the threat, and why it's become a problem now, decide how it manifests and how to present it. Use the seasonal gain that the players chose to guide you.

If they chose "interesting news", then choose a goal or a step towards a steading improvement (see the 10+ entry) and tie that to the threat. They might learn of the threat by pursuing the opportunity, or the opportunity could be a direct result of the threat.

During introductions, Blodwen expressed interest in figuring out where the Forest Folk went. She could learn about that by exploring one of their old encampments—perhaps a Maker-ruin that they abandoned and that is now home to the swyn. A hunter could stumble on the ruin and note the old Forest Folk markings, as well as sign that the crinwin are nearby. The hunter could then bring that news home—with crinwin in hot pursuit!

If they chose "valuable insight", then the threat makes itself known or gets worse, but in a way that reveals something useful about how to address it or about what's causing it.

The crinwin get bolder and more aggressive, eventually attacking during the day and trying to drag off children from the Stream. But maybe the kids' parents fend them off and capture one of the crinwin—giving the PCs a chance to learn what the crinwin want, or where they live, or what's driving them.



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If they chose “unexpected bounty”, then the threat should be revealed in the course of collecting said bounty. Choose a bounty—trade, plentiful game, valuables found in the Wood, etc.—that will put villagers (or someone they deal with) in the path of the threat.

I need a bounty that will draw villagers out into the Wood despite the crinwin. I decide that spring has broken warm and early, and game is plentiful, and trappers are busy setting snares and harvesting fur and meat. One of the trappers could be abducted by the crinwin.

If they chose “trade opportunity”, identify a neighboring community that would either be affected by the threat or become aware of it while traveling to Stonetop. This is the neighbor that will make the trade offer. Choose something they have that the PCs would want. If you can, try to link the neighbor’s offer to the threat. Otherwise, just have the trading party report the threat while making the deal.

The crinwin (and their swyn master) dwell in the Great Wood, and the only “neighbors” who might encounter them are the fae or the spirits and beasts of the wild. Blodwen can speak to spirits and beasts, but I can’t think of anything they would want to trade. The fae, though... fae make deals all the time. Maybe the swyn stole something from a spriggan (like a pinecone that holds a child’s voice) and the spriggan wants it back. It could approach the PCs with an offer—recover the pinecone from this old Maker-ruin, and he’ll trade them a bottle of ffyrnig tonic or the secret to making Truth Seeds.

Alternatively, you could just ask the players to pick something expensive (Value 3) from the Special Items list that they’d like to trade for, and choose an appropriate neighbor that’s willing to sell it. What they want in exchange, though, is something that puts the villagers in the path of the threat.

I don’t feel like introducing the fae at this point, so I ask the players to pick something they’d like to trade for. They want a donkey, and cart if they can manage it. A merchant from Marshedge would gladly provide them, in exchange for 2 Surplus worth of furs and leather. The town only has 1 Surplus; Rhianna and her crew of hunters could try to earn an extra Surplus, but doing so will put them in the crinwin’s (and the swyn’s) territory.

If they chose “Danu’s Blessing”, then use the fine weather as an excuse to put villagers in the path of the threat.

A pair of young sweethearts could take to sneaking out to the Old Wall at night, taking advantage of the early thaw to get a little alone-time. Then, one night, the crinwin could jump them and drag one of them off into the Wood!

On a 6-, threats abound

Things are going to start bad and they're going to get worse.

Start with a threat, one that came up during introductions. If no threats were established, or none of them feel imminent or appropriately bad, then pick something from an almanac or make something up. If multiple threats were established, or you have ideas for more, then pick one to be the main threat for the adventure to revolve around. Use the extra threats to add texture and urgency and a sense of doom (threats abound!) but mostly keep them simmering in the background.

As you design the main threat, be sure to make it...

- ... **external**, so as to get the PCs out of the steading; but...
- ... **nearby**, within a few days of Stonetop, so that they can get there and back with a modest amount of supplies;
- ... **Stonetop's problem**, something that directly threatens the villagers and that no one else will deal with; and
- ... **urgent**, something that will get worse if not addressed.

Ask yourself: what does the threat want? Why is the threat such a problem for Stonetop? Why has it become a problem now when it wasn't a problem before? What changed? Try to tie your answers to details that came up in during introductions.

Next, think about how the threat has already manifested and affected the town. If the threat was established during introductions, what has happened since those established events? If the threat is new, how did it first start? Either way, ask yourself how bad its gotten. It should be pretty bad. Don't worry about the details just yet. You'll ask the players for those during Setup.

These recent events—or the hook (when you drop it)—will almost certainly trigger Meet with Disaster, reducing the village's Fortunes by 1 (from +1 down to +0).

We already established that crinwin raided the town a few weeks ago and that Wynfor (Caradoc's nephew), went missing. Rhianna's worried about something organizing the crinwin, which I've decided is a swyn (a big, arrogant, hypnotic, monkey-headed serpent). It recently moved into (or emerged from?) some nearby Maker-ruins.

Swyn are collectors, so I think: the crinwin are collecting children for their master. Since the raid, search parties have failed to find the child and have been attacked themselves. At least one of the searchers was killed. More raids have happened, targeting the homes nearest to the Great Wood. Trappers and hunters have been attacked and refuse to go out into the Wood. And most recently, another child will have been taken from the steading just before dawn.

First Adventure

Write up your Threat(s)

If your initial adventure involves a threat, then flesh it out using the guidelines in the Threats chapter (page XX). Try to come up with an impending doom, and make the first grim portent the hook for your first adventure.

Also write up any related threats, or at least assign them a threat type and instinct.

Think, too, about other threats identified during introductions that could overlap or cross paths with this adventure, or just add texture. Are there other looming dangers? Are there any individuals, institutions, or afflictions in town that will add to the PC's problems? Write them up as well—at least with a threat type and an instinct.



Vabid rolled a 7–9 for Seasons Change and my central threat is the swyn that's driving the crinwin to steal children. I write it up like so:

SAJRA THE SWYN (*villain*)

Instinct: to indulge its ego.

Recently moved into a ruined Green Lord's tomb about 1½ days from town (why??). Has taken over a few nests of **crinwin** (*rabble; to covet*) and they've been collecting children for it. Already has Wynfor (Caradoc's nephew) and another child (who??).

- More children go missing.
- Some of the (entranced) children return.
- Children recruit followers.
- Reveals itself, demands servitude.
- **Impending doom:** subjugates the town, killing or mesmerizing any opposition.

Stakes: Will Brynfor's parents forgive Caradoc? Who will fall under Sajra's sway? What will become of the stolen children brought under Sajra's control?

The crinwin themselves are also a threat, a rabble (instinct: to covet). But I don't go into more detail. It's really the swyn that's the threat.



Refine your hook

You've identified the central opportunity or threat for the adventure. You've got some idea how that threat will manifest, based on the results of the first Seasons Change move.

Now, firm up the details. What exactly is going to happen? When will this happen? Where? Who will be involved? Who will witness it and what will they report? Don't get too specific just yet, but you should be able to answer these questions in general terms.

As you refine your hook, make sure that it...

- ... **is actionable**, giving the PCs some chance to actually do something about it, and implying an obvious first step for them to take;
- ... **involves all of the PCs**, giving them all a chance to react to it and have their input; and
- ... **communicates urgency**, making it clear that if the PCs just sit on their hands, something bad will happen and/or an opportunity will be lost.

The details of the hook will help you identify the setup questions that you need to ask, as well as the when and where you'll frame the first scene.

Vabid got a 7-9 for the first Seasons Change move and chose "unexpected bounty." I decided that spring broke warm and early, with small game abundant. Trappers are busy plying the Wood, despite the crinwin threat. One of these trappers will get abducted by crinwin.

But wait... that won't be actionable by itself. Plus, the crinwin have been abducting children; why would they grab a fully grown trapper?

Oh! They won't grab the trapper, they'll take his son (who's out with him checking snares). The trapper's son is bigger than the other kids, and the trapper will stab one of the crinwin, giving the PCs a trail to follow. That's actionable!

I consider having the trapper use some sort of signal whistle to call for help, drawing the PCs to the site of the attack. But I reject that, because it'd be too easy to have Rhianna and her crew rush out to help and leave everyone else behind in the village.

No, the trapper will run back into town yelling for help. That'll give all the PCs the opportunity to be involved. And all this will happen in the morning, meaning they have a chance to try to track down the boy in daylight. They might be able to save him if they act quickly!



Setup questions

Before you set your first scene, ask a bunch of loaded questions. Your goal here is to:

- ⊙ Establish key details
- ⊙ Highlight relevant setting elements
- ⊙ Foreshadow
- ⊙ Make things personal

If you have time, write these questions down as part of your prep. Write in pencil, for now! You're likely to make a few revisions as you go.

You might also end up writing a "love letter" or two, instead of or in addition to some of your questions.

Establish key details

What details need to be established before you start play? What needs to be true for your hook to make sense? What obvious questions arise as you think about those things? Ask leading questions that establish those things, but at the same time give the players some creative control.

Why do this? Why not just tell the players the things that need to be true?

Mostly: because it's more interactive. If you ask someone to think about a question and create an answer, they process the details of the question more deeply. That's true even if the question is about something rather mundane and inconsequential. Answering makes them get engage with the world that we're creating together, and it gives them a little more ownership of that world.

But also: your players will come up with details that you never would. And even when they don't come up with anything unexpected, the fact that they came up with it instead of you gives the whole thing a more authentic texture. The world feels more real, less like something that one person is just making up.

My hook assumes that spring broke warm and early and that the trappers are out in the Wood catching game. That gives me these questions:

- ⊙ *When was the last time spring came this early and was this warm?*
- ⊙ *What type of game are the trappers busy trapping?*

The crinwin have been actively raiding lately, so I feel like there must be something that lets the trappers feel at least a little safe. That gives me this question:

- ⊙ *How do trappers ward off crinwin? Do you think it really works?*

Finally, my central threat is the swyn, and the crinwin are collecting children for it. We know Wynfor (Caradoc's nephew) went missing during the last crinwin raid, but "collecting" implies more of a pattern than that. I think there must be a previous child who went missing, and the village gave up on searching for her. To establish those details, I'll ask:

- ⊙ *Who was the youth who went missing in the Wood a few weeks before that nighttime raid by the crinwin?*
- ⊙ *Why did you all give up searching for her?*

Highlight setting elements

Next, identify any unique setting elements (like the Makers, the wards on the roads, the Pale Hunter, the widespread fear of water, etc.) that will play a significant role in the hook, or that would directly inform the PC's reactions to the hook. Write a question about each of those elements, just to make sure it's something that the players are familiar with.

The crinwin are a setting element unique to Stonetop, and they'll obviously play a big part in this. They've come up a lot during introductions, but some of the more "common knowledge" details about crinwin haven't come up, like the fact that they're child-sized, and arboreal, and live in big papery nests in the trees, and that they mimic sounds. So asking about some of those might be a good idea. I jot down these questions:

- *After the crinwin raid, what feature about their small, hairless, child-like bodies did you find most unnerving?*
- *When you've seen crinwin moving quickly through the forest canopy, what natural creature do they most remind you of?*
- *Remember that time you got lured off into the Woods by some crinwin? Whose voice were they mimicking, that got you to follow them?*

If there's a setting element that you're pretty sure will come up, but that won't be directly relevant to the hook itself... don't ask about it yet. Wait to ask questions about it until they encounter that setting element in play, or at least until its alluded to.

Thinking about it more, the whole "crinwin mimic noises and voices" thing isn't relevant to the hook or how the PCs react to it. I decide to drop that question.

Likewise, I know that the swyn is hiding in the tomb of a mummified Green Lord, so I consider asking some questions about the Green Lords or their ruins out in the Wood. But on second thought, it's not relevant yet—and it wouldn't make any sense to ask about it.

Foreshadow

Ask yourself if there's anything that you want to foreshadow: a threat, a motive, a consequence, a discovery, etc. Write a question or two that points in that direction, without being too obvious.

Foreshadowing questions are tricky! If you can't come up with a way to be subtle, just skip the foreshadowing!

The swyn is collecting children, right? I'd like to hint at that. So, I want these kids to have something in common, something that makes them worthy for the swyn's collection. I don't care particularly care what that is, though, so that becomes the question (about the girl who went missing prior to the raid):

- *What did this girl have in common with Wynfor and the other kids the crinwin tried to abduct?*

I'd like to hint at the swyn itself, but I can't think of any way to ask a question about it that won't be a dead giveaway that, yup, the swyn is the boss. So I leave that out.

First Adventure

Make things personal

Ask questions of each character, so that all the players are involved. Try to balance the number of questions you're asking to each. If there's an imbalance, try asking one character what they think about another character's answer or past behaviors—and feel free to make it all sorts of loaded. For example: “Vahid, why do you think Rhianna was wrong to call off the search for the first missing girl?”



When prepping questions in advance, look at each one that you've written and personalize it. Decide to whom you'll ask each question. Fine tune each question to make sense from the character's perspective (remember: address these questions to the characters, not the players). Play on the themes that have started to emerge for that character. Ask the questions in such a way that they presume the character's direct involvement. Or, frame the questions so that the player is telling you what their character believes or has heard, rather than what they *know*.

The point is to make the whole starting situation directly relevant to the characters, to give them motivations and personal stakes. Get these questions right, and the players will bite on your hook with very little prompting.

As you revise the questions, also think about the order in which you'll ask them. There's a real art to this, and no hard-and-fast rule for it. Generally, go chronologically. Ask first about things that happened further in the past, then ask about things that have been happening more recently (or that are still happening). And don't be afraid to cut, either! If you can't figure out when to ask a question, ask yourself if it's really necessary!

I want to start by asking about the missing girl, the one taken prior to the raid. I think Caradoc would identify with her, so he gets this question. It becomes:

- ⊙ “Caradoc, who was the girl who went missing, a few weeks before that night-time raid by the crinwin? Why was she out in the Wood, alone, in late winter?”

Next, I’ll ask Rhianna why they stopped searching for the girl, because she’s the marshal and her crew are all woodsmen. I tweak it to make it her decision to stop looking, and to twist the knife with some guilt:

- ⊙ “Rhianna, what prompted you to call off the search for this girl, empty handed? Why do her parents still blame you?”

I think that the next logical question would be about the detail shared by this missing girl and Wynfor. This seems like a chance to play up Vahid’s cleverness and caginess. I phrase it so that it’s something he’s figured out but maybe hasn’t shared with others:

- ⊙ “Vahid, it’s occurred to you that this girl shares a trait with Wynfor, and with the other kids that the crinwin tried to abduct. What is that common trait?”

Chronologically, the next question is the one about the dead crinwin. I want to ask Blodwen this one, given her ties to the natural and unnatural. I tweak it just a little, to play up the “soft hearted” theme that emerged for her during introductions. It becomes:

- ⊙ “Blodwen, after the crinwin raid, when you examined their small, hairless, child-like bodies... what unnatural feature did you find so tragic?”

I could ask the other question about the crinwin now (about how they move through the trees), but it doesn’t really fit and honestly, the more I think about it, the less I want to include it. I decide to cut it!

I do still want to ask about the early spring and the plentiful game. I pick Blodwen for these, but because she’s so young, I rephrase the questions to ask what others are saying and doing. I also crunch them together:

- ⊙ “Blodwen, when does Seren the Eldest say we last had such a warm and early spring? What sort of game has been especially plentiful, prompting trappers to spend so much time in the Wood?”

For the question about how trappers ward off crinwin, I feel like this is something Rhianna would know about because of how much time she and her crew spend in the Wood. But I like the idea of getting Vahid involved, playing up his know-it-all status and the brewing tension between him and Rhianna. So I split the questions like so:

- ⊙ “Rhianna, what do folks who ply the Wood—like you and your crew—always wear to keep the crinwin at bay?”
- ⊙ “Vahid, why do you doubt the efficacy of this anti-crinwin charm?”

Okay! I’m feeling good, but I’d like to give Caradoc one more. I’ll prompt some hope and urgency with this:

- ⊙ “Caradoc, why are you so certain that the missing children are alive?”

First Adventure

Love letters

Consider writing one or more "love letters" to go along with these questions. A love letter usually...

- ... **is addressed to a particular PC;**
- ... **establishes some sort of experience** that the PC has had (or is still having);
- ... **has them describe something** about the experience;
- ... **tells them to roll** with an appropriate stat;
- ... and, based on the result of the roll, either...
 - ... **has the player invent or ask for** 1 or 2 useful details; or
 - ... **gives the PC some sort of resource** for the upcoming adventure.

For best results, write the love letter on an index card or print it out before play. Give it to the character at whatever part of the setup makes sense, and have them read it aloud.

I'd like to ask something that fore-shadows the swyn, but directly asking anything about the swyn would be too obvious. Instead of asking a question, I write this love letter to Blodwen. It establishes a few of the rumored threats in the Wood (including the swyn) and gives her the option to learn more about them in play.

DEAR BLODWEN,
SEREN THE CRONE HAS TOLD YOU COUNTLESS TALES OF UNNATURAL CREATURES IN THE WOOD. LATELY, THOUGH, SHE'S BEEN BRINGING UP THINGS THAT STEAL AWAY CHILDREN, SUCH AS:

- * FAE, LIKE SPRIGGANS (THIEVES + HOARDERS), GLODDESTAF (ETERNAL REVELERS), AND GLENWYD (WHO WISH TO BE ADORED)
- * THE GLASBREN, BEAUTIFUL TREE SPIRITS WHO'VE BEEN KNOWN TO ENTRANCE COMELY MORTALS
- * SWYN, BIG SNAKES WITH MONKEY-LIKE FACES, HYPNOTIC EYES, AND MESMERIZING VOICES
- * THE FOMORAIG, OF WHICH SHE BARELY WHISPERS, ANCIENT EVILS HIDING IN THE EARTH

OLD SEREN DOES DRONE ON, AND SHE RARELY TELLS A STORY THE SAME WAY TWICE, SO LET'S SEE HOW WELL YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING. ROLL +INT: ON A 10+ HOLD 2 STORIES; ON A 7-9, HOLD 1 STORY.

WHEN YOU SPEND 1 STORY AND TELL US THE NAME OF ONE OF SEREN'S TALES, ASK THE GM A QUESTION ABOUT ONE OF THE CREATURES DESCRIBED ABOVE. THE GM WILL TELL YOU SOMETHING INTERESTING, USEFUL, AND RELEVANT, AS REVEALED BY THE TALE.

ON A 6-, HOLD 1 STORY BUT WHEN YOU SPEND IT, THE GM WILL TELL YOU TWO VERSIONS OF THE STORY WITH CONFLICTING INFORMATION, ONLY ONE OF WHICH IS TRUE.

XOXO - YOUR GM



Setting the scene

After the setup questions have been answered, start play in Stonetop. Your goal is to establish what mundane, daily life looks like, so that you can drop the hook right in the middle of it.

Work backwards from the hook. What time of day will the hook happen? What do you want to be happening in town? Where will the hook drop? Where should the PCs be when it does?

Frame a scene to support all that. Tell the players the time of day, what's going on, what the weather's like. Zoom in on a specific place in the village or just outside it, either by dictating a place or asking the PCs where they are.



Next, ask questions that establish details and explore daily life. What are you doing? Who's with you? What are you eating? What are you looking forward to? Whose eye do you hope to catch? If you can, work in questions that reinforce the setup and/or foreshadow the hook. "What loss is felt here, caused by the crinwin's last raid?" That sort of thing.

Once the scene is set, spend some time making homefront moves and seeing how the PCs react. These GM moves are discussed fully in chapter XX ("Homefront"), but for now, work off this list:

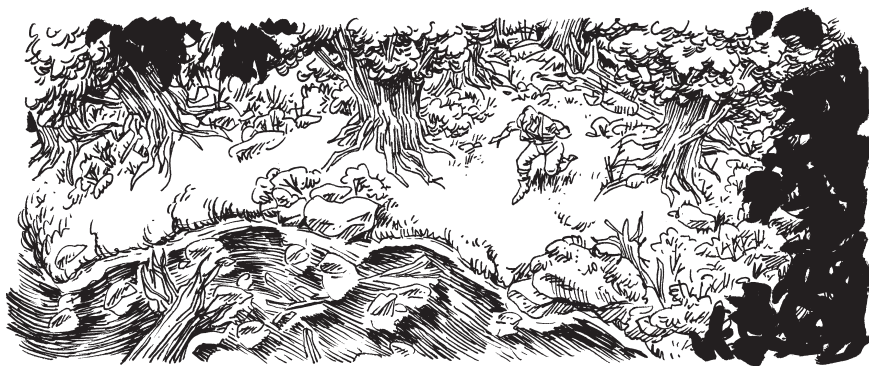
- ⊙ Introduce someone
- ⊙ Reveal simmering tensions
- ⊙ Present a want or need
- ⊙ Remind them of their obligations
- ⊙ Quicken a threat or crisis
- ⊙ Oppose their wishes
- ⊙ Play them against each other
- ⊙ Change a relationship
- ⊙ Show them how others really feel

Avoid serious conflicts or dramatic reveals. It's okay to have a PC argue with their spouse if that's something they often do, but don't, like, spring the fact that the spouse has been having an affair! You're establishing daily life (including daily drama), not setting things on fire. Not yet.

For preparation, jot down:

- ⊙ A sentence or two describing the scene(s).
- ⊙ The questions you intend to ask.
- ⊙ The homefront moves you plan to make, with whatever details you find useful.

These aren't the only things you'll say or ask, and you can adjust them as needed, but they'll give you a solid starting point.



The trapper should stagger into town in the morning, giving the PCs some daylight to work with. The trapper and his son would have set off at first light, and the attack would have come a couple hours later. So, the trapper would get back to town mid-morning. That's when I'll set the scene:

"It's mid-morning. Farmers till the fields and folks go about their chores. It's another fine, clear day, still cool but likely to get warm."

To play up the "unexpected bounty," I'll zoom in on Caradoc—he's the tanner's apprentice.

"Caradoc, you're at work, hides and furs all over.

- ⊕ *"What unsavory task does Sawyl have you working on this morning?"*
- ⊕ *"Are you glad for all the work the trappers are bringing in, or annoyed?"*
- ⊕ *"Aside from the gore, entrails, and noxious fumes, what's the worst part of this job?"*

Maybe I'll make some moves here, play out an interaction with Sawyl. I'll wing it.

Next, I'll ask the other PCs the following:

- ⊕ *"Where are each of you this morning? What task or chore are you working on?"*
- ⊕ *"Who's with you and what are you talking about?"*
- ⊕ *"As you look about, what do you each see that you've seen a thousand times before?"*
- ⊕ *"Who or what do you encounter that makes you think of the missing children and the recent crinwin raid?"*

I'll ask follow-up questions and improvise based on what they give me, but I definitely want to make these GM moves:

Remind them of their obligations: Tegwen (Blodwen's mother), nags her about not attending to some mundane thing.

Play them against each other: Eira, Rhianna's lieutenant, complains to her that Vahid has been creeping on her.

- ⊕ *"Remember that time you got lured off into the Woods by some crinwin? Whose voice were they mimicking, that got you to follow them?"*

Dropping the hook

Once the initial scene is set, it's time to drop the hook. Make GM moves that introduce the core threat or opportunity of the adventure and prompt the PCs to act.

You can (and should) keep asking questions after you drop the hook. You might need to ask such questions in order to make the hook “grabby” enough. With that said, limit your questions to things the characters would know the answer to already (“How are you related to Gorlas? Why is everyone so quick to dismiss him?”) rather than asking the players to invent entirely new elements (“Who comes barging in, muttering about crinwin nests?”)

For preparation, write down the moves you intend to make and how they'll manifest, plus any questions you plan to ask. This might mean coming up with specifics that have been vague in your mind so far: who, exactly, burst in with news of a crinwin nest? Why should the PCs trust him? What exactly did he see? Either decide on these things now, or decide that you'll ask the characters for the answer during play.

None of this prep is set in stone! You'll often need to adapt and improvise based on the details established during setup and the initial scene. Stay loose!

Reactions

After you've dropped your hook, it's time to explore everyone's reactions. If your hook is compelling, the PCs will likely head out to deal with things. But before (or maybe as) they make preparations, show how others respond to the hook and the PCs' intended course of action.

This is a great time to think about NPCs with relationships to the PCs. How does the Heavy's spouse respond to him going out into the field again? What does the Would-be Hero's father say? Who thinks the expedition is folly? Who wants to come with? Lean heavily on the home-front moves during this segment.

You're not just doing this to show off the NPC's; you want to see how the PCs respond to both the hook and the NPCs. Keep an eye out for PCs triggering moves, especially *Persuade*, *Seek Insight*, *Know Things*, and *Defy Danger* (the danger being that someone takes offense, or doesn't believe their lies, or so on). Take notes on whose feathers the PC's ruffle, who gets in their way, and who reveals themselves to be on their side. Some of these people will likely become *Threats* after the first adventure.

When prepping the adventure, jot down some notes including:

- ⊙ The NPCs who you think will be present.
- ⊙ The moves that you think you'll make and the NPCs you think you'll use to make them.
- ⊙ Any questions you plan on asking.

Again, none of this is set in stone! Adapt as needed to reflect the events in play.

If they ignore the hook

I start thinking about how I'll drop the hook, and I realize that I haven't named the trapper or his son. I'll do that now. I grab the Steading Playbook and skim the Residents section. I could create a new, random NPC, but I see Pryder, the youth who Blodwen said is beloved of the Goddess and her duty to protect. That's perfect, so he's the son. I pick a name for his father, Rheinal, and add him to the residents list.

Now, I start planning out the moves for my hook and filling in specific details. I also start thinking about questions I might ask for each move, to make the hook more personal and motivating to the PCs. My notes end up like this:

Announce trouble: *Someone's yelling from down in the Wood. They're getting closer to town.*

Introduce someone: *It's Rheinal. Someone, let's say Morwenna (Caradoc's crush) is helping him up the cliffside trail from the Wood. He's barely standing, panicked, covered in blood.*

☞ *"Blodwen, Rheinal is Pryder's father, one of the trappers. Aside from his devotion to his family, what's his most notable trait?"*

Reveal an unwelcome truth: *Pryder was dragged off by crinwin. They were out checking snares early this morning and got separated near the Stream. Rheinal heard Pryder cry out. He found Pryder struggling with crinwin, then he got jumped. Rheinal stabbed one crinwin, got clocked on the head, and passed out. When he came to, Pryder and the crinwin were gone. If anyone asks: yes, Pryder shares the same trait that the other missing kids had in common.*

Ask a loaded question: *"Vahid, you notice that Rheinal still wears his anti-crinwin charm, for all the good it did him; do you say anything?"*

Offer an opportunity: *The attack happened an hour or two ago, and Pryder is considerably bigger than the other kids who were abducted. They would have had to drag him, leaving a pretty obvious trail. Plus, Rheinal wounded one of them—it'd be dripping blood.*

☞ *"Rhianna, which member of your crew is the best tracker?"*

☞ *"Blodwen, whose hound has the best nose? Think you could get them to loan you its sense of smell?"*

First Adventure

The book will take place on the outskirts of town, at the top of the trail leading down into the Wood. These NPCs are likely to be there:

- ⊙ *Rheinal, obviously*
- ⊙ *Morwenna (Caradoc's crush), helping Rheinal up the cliffside path*
- ⊙ *Gwendl the Matron (one of Blodwen's mentors, village healer) will arrive soon*
- ⊙ *Sawyl the tanner (Caradoc's boss); the tannery is right there*
- ⊙ *Eira (Rhianna's lieutenant, who Vahid secretly watches) will probably be talking to Rhianna, and will probably come along*

That's plenty of NPCs for the initial scene, but I also expect there to be some interaction with:

- ⊙ *Glenys (Caradoc's aunt, Wynfor's mom) and the other missing child's parents.*
- ⊙ *Tegwen, Blodwen's somewhat overbearing mother.*

I start thinking about some of the moves that these people might make:

Present a want or needs: *Rheinal insists on gathering a search party right away, and going with them to rescue his son, despite barely being able to stand.*

Point out a flaw in a person or plan *(one of Gwendl's moves): Gwendl insists that Rheinal isn't going anywhere, injured as he is. Surely he can give Rhianna and company directions to where the attack happened.*

Show them how others really feel: *Morwenna gives Caradoc an admiring glance if he says he plans to join the expedition.*

Reveal simmering tensions: *Glenys throws shade at Caradoc, blaming him for Wynfor's abduction ("You've done enough, haven't you?"). The missing girl's parents are bitter and say something to Rhianna like "Maybe don't give up this time."*

Oppose their wishes: *Tegwen forbids Blodwen from going, but has no authority to do so.*

Play them against each other: *"Rhianna, are you really going to let Blodwen and Caradoc come along?"*



Most likely, the PCs will take your hook and go deal with the threat/seize the opportunity. But what if they don't?

First and foremost: **do not force them to act on the hook**. It's not your job to lead them down a pre-planned story. It's your job to portray a rich, mysterious world, to punctuate their lives with adventure, and to play to find out what happens. It's the players' job to decide what their characters do, to balance risk against reward and show you what matters to them. It's their choice whether to act on your hook, and how. Don't take that away from them.

So what do you do if you drop your hook, ask your questions, have your NPCs react, and the PCs don't do what you expect?

What you do is **run the damn game**. Make GM moves that follow your principles and work toward your agenda. Portray your threats and your NPCs with integrity. Don't punish the players for ignoring your hook, but show them what happens as a consequence.

The PCs let an opportunity pass? Okay, cool with you, but how do your NPCs react? Who's upset? Who goes off on their own to try and seize the opportunity on their own? What trouble do they get into? Is the opportunity still there, or does it fade away? Does someone else (another steading, the fae, a villain, etc.) act on it instead?

The PCs ignored a threat? Okay, cool with you, but start advancing grim portents and showing the PCs the results. Show how the NPCs react, rationally or irrationally. Show how things get worse. Think dangerous, and let the world burn if the PCs don't do anything about it. When you're prepping the adventure,

think about what will happen if the PCs do nothing. If there's a central threat, lean heavily on its grim portents. Jot down a few moves that you'll make to show the consequences of inaction, and be prepared to improvise.

If the PCs don't go after Pryder, then I'll probably make the following moves:

Reveal simmering tensions: *townsfolk snub Rhianna and disrespect her; she catches some of her crew complaining to Eira about inaction.*

Present a want or need: *Rheinal, Glenys, and the other parents of missing children plea with Rhianna to do something about the crinwin.*

Quicken a threat or crisis: *Another child goes missing, stolen from a home at the edge of town.*

Oppose their wishes: *Rheinal puts a posse together to go looking for the kids.*

Hurt Them: *If they leave without the PCs, they're attacked and many are killed by crinwin.*

Advance a grim portent: *Wynfor and the missing girl appear at the edge of town, dirty and thin but glowing with a weird inner joy.*

Heading out

Eventually, they'll be off on an adventure! Here's how that usually plays out.

Preparations

When the PCs announce their intentions to head out and pursue the opportunity or deal with the threat, they'll often trigger these moves:

- ⊗ **Chart a Course**, in which they tell you where they plan to go and you tell them what's involved in getting there.
- ⊗ **Outfit**, in which they "gear up" for the expedition.
- ⊗ **Requisition**, in which they might borrow town assets (like horses or carts).

As they make these moves, sprinkle in various homefront and other GM moves as appropriate. For example, when they Chart a Course, maybe **ask a loaded question** to the Ranger about the dangers they might find. When they Outfit, maybe **introduce someone**, like the publican who provides them with whisky for the road.

The PCs might also Trade & Barter, Know Things, Seek Insight, or Persuade. They might recruit some followers (page XX), or have some folks insist on coming along. They might set the town to work while they're gone and have them Pull Together (page XX), or Muster the town's defenses (page XX).

See the Expeditions chapter (page XX) for more details.

Travel

After preparations, they'll head toward the threat or opportunity. This involves you...

- ... **presenting legs of travel and points of interest**, describing the environment and the weather;
- ... **asking lots of questions**, like, "What's the worst about slogging through these hills?" or "What do the old-timers say about this place?";
- ... **making GM moves**, like having their followers cause or get into trouble, providing a choice of paths, presenting the challenges that you outlined when they Charted a Course, and introducing other dangers and discoveries;
- ... **asking "What do you do?"**; and
- ... **resolving the PC's actions**.

You'll repeat these as necessary, zooming in and out as you make GM moves and the players make moves of their own. They might encounter something that distracts them from their primary goal, or that gets them lost, or that beats them up so badly that they turn back and head home in defeat. Or, they might reach their destination with ease. It's all good!

Travel (and the prep you might do for it) is detailed in the Expeditions chapter (see page XX).

Resolution

Eventually, probably, the PCs will get where they're going and attempt to deal with the threat or seize the opportunity. You'll zoom in on the action, describe the situation, and make GM moves. The PCs will respond and trigger their moves. We'll all find out what happens together.

When prepping the adventure, list the sites, dangers, and discoveries that you expect to feature in the resolution. For each one, do as much preparation as you find valuable. See the following chapters for guidelines on how to prepare these things:

- ⊙ **Sites** (page XX)
- ⊙ **Dangers** (page XX)
- ⊙ **Discoveries** (page XX)
- ⊙ **NPCs** (page XX)

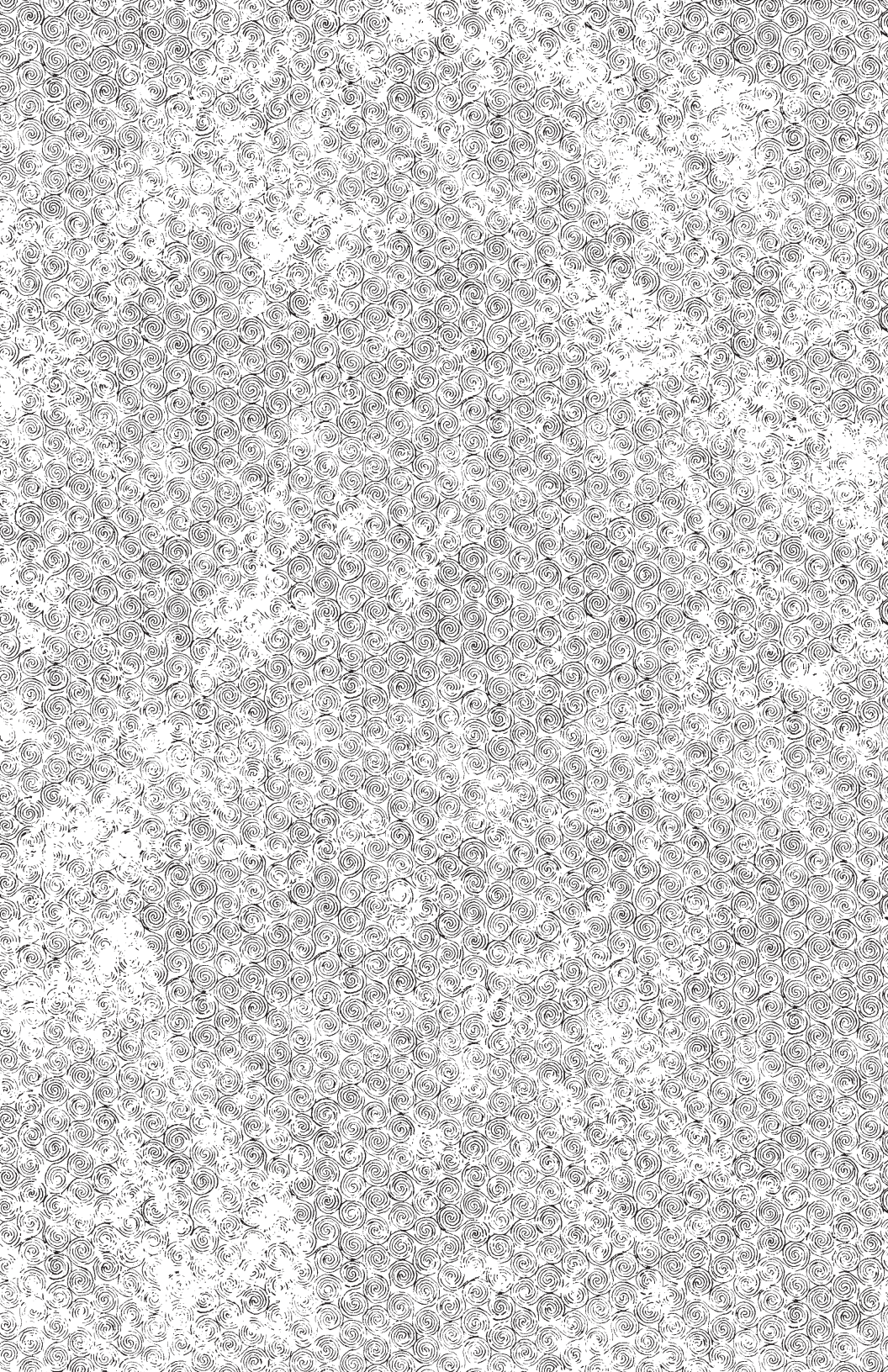
Aftermath

At some point, the PCs will call it quits and decide to head home. Maybe they've seized the opportunity or put down the threat. Maybe not, and they either lost their chance or are too exhausted to continue. This is the aftermath.

During the aftermath, the PCs tie up loose ends and return home. You update your notes—especially your threats—to reflect how the world has changed and identify any new problems the PCs might have to deal with.

When preparing an adventure, there's not much you can—or should—prepare for the aftermath. So much depends on the events of the adventure itself; there's almost no way to predict when the PCs will head for home, what loose threads will be out there, what issues they will be dealing with, etc. Mostly, you'll play it by ear.

For guidance on what to do at the end of the adventure, see the "Heading home" section of the Expeditions chapter (page XX) and the Between Sessions chapter (page XX).



Threats



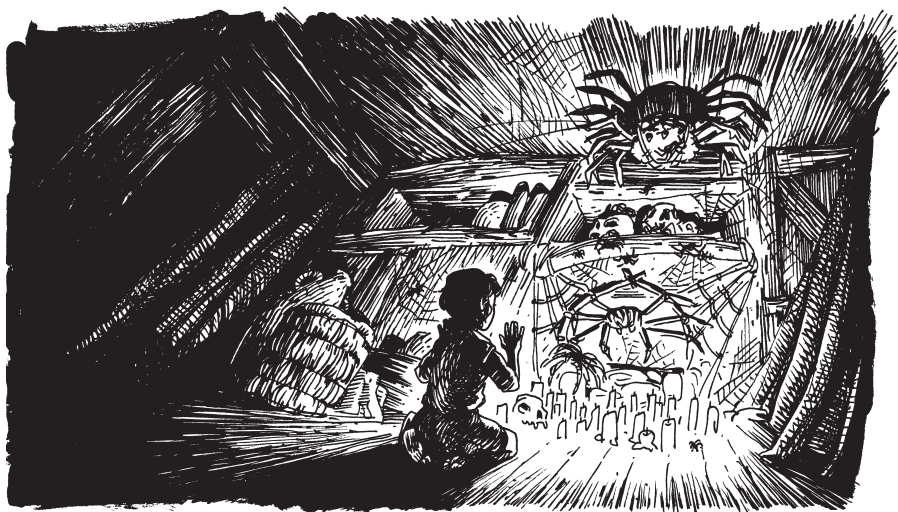
When to write up threats

Writing a threat

Example threats

Updating threats

Threats



A **threat** is an ongoing problem that will cause trouble for the PCs if left unchecked. When you recognize or decide that something—an NPC, a monster, a situation—is going to be a worsening or recurring issue, it's probably worth writing up as a threat.

Writing up threats is not strictly required, but doing so will make things easier to manage as the world of your campaign grows more complex. Your GM playbook (see page **XX**) includes pages designed to help you keep track of threats.

Not every NPC, monster, or situation needs to be (or should be) a threat. The giant spiders between the PCs and the old Maker-ruins? If they're not going to get worse as time passes, they're probably just a danger to be faced if the PCs want to explore the ruins.

In other words, don't bother writing up a threat unless you know it's going to be a big deal.

Here's an example of a fully written threat:

NIA (*wildcard*)

Instinct: to befriend spiders

Young girl, spider-touched after her ordeal with the **Mother-of-Spiders**. Blodwen's niece; daughter of Cadoc (see **Town Council**).

- Talks and plays with spiders
- Sets up a spider "shrine"
- Brings home a baby nailadd (giant spider)
- **Impending doom:** it kills someone

Stakes: How will the town react to her? Can her link to the spiders be broken? Can it be used for good?

Nia is an example of an NPC who has become a threat. She's not a villain or even a danger—she's a little girl, Blodwen's niece, someone the PCs rescued—but her link to the Mother-of-Spiders makes her a source of future trouble. She's a threat.

Here's another example:

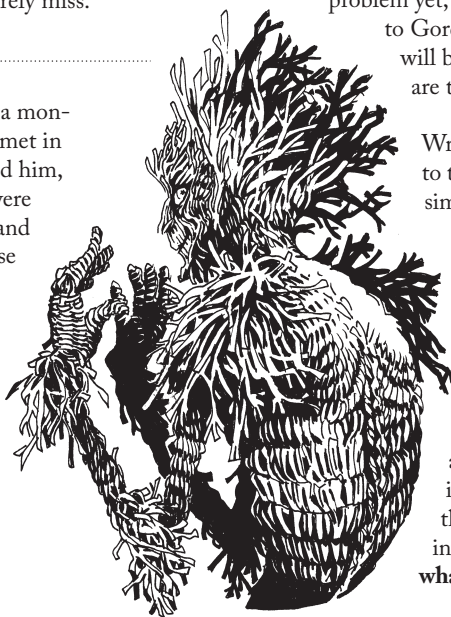
THORNTUMB (*magical entity*)

Instinct: to acquire

Dwelt in the Green Lord's Tomb. Tried to steal from PCs, but they caught him. Helped them kill Sajra. Grudgingly promised Vahid not to try to steal from, harm, or trap them. Lusts after the Mindgem. Scared of Rhianna. Thinks Caradoc is an easy mark. Blodwen owes him for the flower he gave her.

When you *dicker with Thornthumb*, roll +CHA: **on a 10+**, he'll trade for but a pittance (a song, a kiss, a flask of whisky); **on a 7-9**, he asks for something innocuous but with an insidious cost (like a song, which you forget utterly after singing, or a kiss—but not a kiss right now, no no, the memory of your first kiss); **on a 6-**, what he wants, you'll surely miss.

Thornthumb was a monster that the PCs met in play. They captured him, allied with him, were betrayed by him, and extracted a promise from him to let them be. But he's still out there, and he's the type of guy to hold a grudge. He's a threat.



And one last example:

ANWEN (*villain*)

Instinct: to maintain order at all costs

Exiled from Stonetop years back, after poisoning folk (weak ones) during a harsh winter (less mouths to feed). Runs a bar/brothel in Gordin's Delve; fingers in lots of pies. **Ropr** (*beast*, to keep Anwen's favor) is her #2. Soft spot for **Iona** (*wildcard*, to live comfortably).

GM moves:

- Find someone's weakness
- Sacrifice another to advance a goal
- Have someone killed

Anwen hasn't shown up on screen yet. She was a player's answer to "Who's the worst person you know of in Gordin's Delve, and why are they so scary?" She's not a problem yet, but the PCs are headed to Gordin's Delve, and she sure will be. She and her minions are threats.

Writing up threats is a way to track loose ends and simmering conflicts, which helps you **portray a rich and mysterious world**. Threats provide problems and bad outcomes to spring on the PCs, making it easier to **punctuate their lives with adventure**. And a threat's write-up makes it easier to portray that threat with integrity, helping you **play to see what happens**.

When to write up threats

Threats are prep: you write them up between sessions. When you write up a threat, you make real, binding decisions about it that require thought and care. Don't do this during play.

Specifically, you should write up threats...

After introductions

As you review your notes (page **XX**), pick out the ongoing problems that the players established. Write them up as threats, to whatever level of detail makes sense right now.

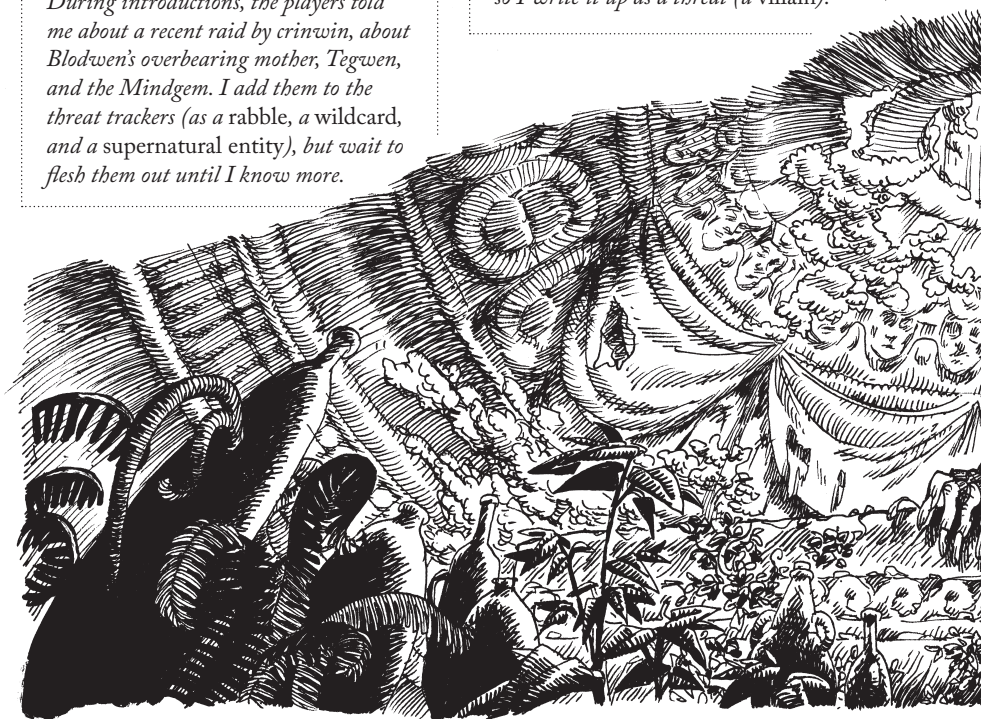
During introductions, the players told me about a recent raid by crinwin, about Blodwen's overbearing mother, Tegwen, and the Mindgem. I add them to the threat trackers (as a rabble, a wildcard, and a supernatural entity), but wait to flesh them out until I know more.

When Seasons Change

The Seasons Change move sometimes tells you to introduce or worsen a threat, or that threats abound. This might prompt you to create a new threat, one that the PCs haven't encountered before. The threat's **type**, **instinct**, and **grim portents** will help you to flesh out the hook of any related adventure (page **XX**).

Vahid rolled a 7-9 on the first Seasons Change, which means their first adventure will involve a threat. I decided that the crinwin have come under the sway of a swyn (a big, hypnotic, monkey-faced snake) and they are stealing children to add to the swyn's collection.

The swyn is the real source of the trouble, so I write it up as a threat (a villain).



After a session

If someone introduced an element (NPC, monster, situation, etc.) during a session, and it might cause trouble later, write it up as a threat while it's still fresh in your mind. Or at least make note of it, and write it up in full later. This will serve as a reminder to bring it up in future sessions.

After their first adventure, the PCs returned to explore the ancient tomb and Blodwen disturbed the spirit of the mummified Green Lord interred within. While it mostly keeps to its blissful, constructed afterlife, it could definitely cause trouble for the PCs later.

I write it up as a threat (a magical entity).

When preparing an adventure

When you just know that a new threat is going to show up, and you already have a notion of what it looks like, it's a good idea to write it up before your next session. This could happen when the players tell you that they're going to do X, and you know that doing X will mean encountering Y, and Y feels like trouble. Or it could happen when you end a session on a cliffhanger (like with a missed homefront roll, or with something scary approaching) and between sessions you decide that you'll introduce a new threat.

At the end of the last session, the PCs (well, Vahid) talked about going to Three-Coven Lake to find part of the Mindgem's body. I think it'd be cool to have a group of Hillfolk devoted to keeping folks away from the lakes, and to keep the horrors of the lakes contained. I name them The White Hand and write them up as a threat (an institution).



Writing a threat

To write up a threat, follow these steps. The most important steps come first; the later steps are optional.

- 1) Give the threat a **name** and **type**.
- 2) Add it to the appropriate **threat tracker**.
- 3) Give it an **instinct**, if it doesn't already have one.
- 4) Write a quick **description**, including related threats and NPCs.
- 5) If it has **momentum**: write out its **impending doom** and **grim portents**.
- 6) Optional: write some **stakes** questions.
- 7) Optional: pick or write **GM moves** to further define its behavior/capabilities.
- 8) Optional: write **custom player moves**.

1 Name & type

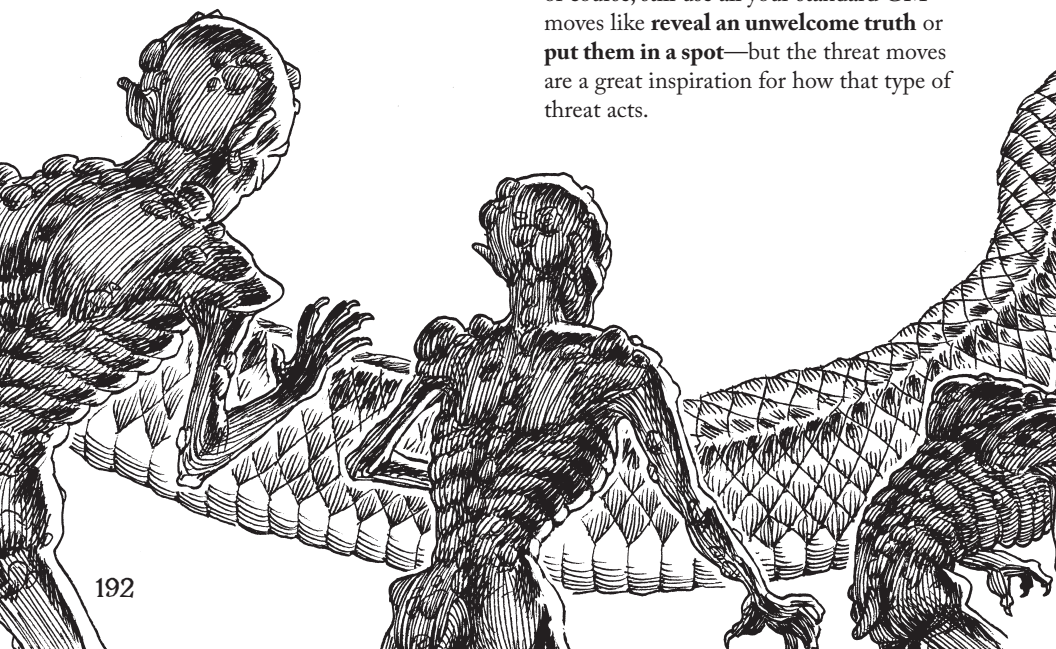
Give your threat a straightforward name, that easily distinguishes it from any other threats you're already tracking.

Every threat also has a **type**, which describes its fundamental nature, its place in the world and in the ongoing story. There are eight different threat types, described on the following pages.

It will usually be obvious which type a new threat belongs to. If it's not obvious, skim the moves for each type and pick the type that fits best. A description of each type (and its associated moves) appear on the following pages.

Threat types in play

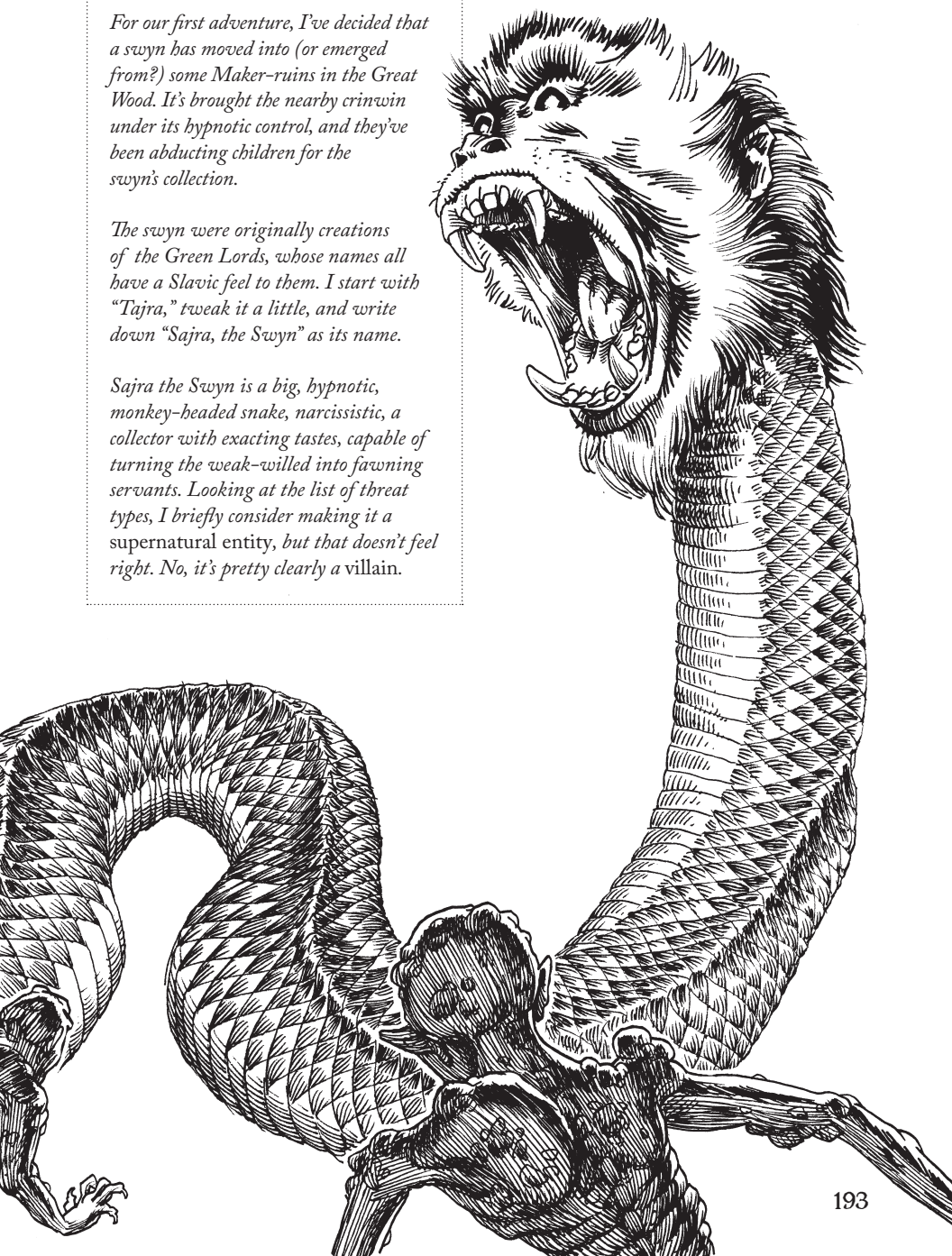
Each threat type comes with a series of GM moves, which reflect how that type of threat typically causes trouble. You can use a threat's special moves whenever the threat is involved, on screen or off. You're not limited to those moves—you can, of course, still use all your standard GM moves like **reveal an unwelcome truth** or **put them in a spot**—but the threat moves are a great inspiration for how that type of threat acts.



For our first adventure, I've decided that a swyn has moved into (or emerged from?) some Maker-ruins in the Great Wood. It's brought the nearby crinwin under its hypnotic control, and they've been abducting children for the swyn's collection.

The swyn were originally creations of the Green Lords, whose names all have a Slavic feel to them. I start with "Tajra," tweak it a little, and write down "Sajra, the Swyn" as its name.

Sajra the Swyn is a big, hypnotic, monkey-headed snake, narcissistic, a collector with exacting tastes, capable of turning the weak-willed into fawning servants. Looking at the list of threat types, I briefly consider making it a supernatural entity, but that doesn't feel right. No, it's pretty clearly a villain.



Threats

THREAT TYPE

Affliction

Afflictions aren't people or monsters or tangible things. They're behaviors, circumstances, or conditions that make people suffer, bring them into conflict, or just make them worry and fret.

Afflictions can affect just an individual or two (even a specific PC), a group, a population, or even an entire region.

GM moves for afflictions:

- Worsen or quicken
- Spread to others/suck others in
- Mutate, take on a new form/aspect
- Eat away at something/someone
- Strip someone of honor/dignity
- Drive someone to desperation
- Justify selfishness, neglect
- Drive a wedge between people
- Cause delusion, stubbornness, foolishness
- Sow panic or despair
- Trigger shortages, hoarding
- Prompt violence, hatred, blame

Example afflictions:

- ⊙ The black pox (instinct: to infect and spread)
- ⊙ Braith's feud with Thecla (instinct: to make people pick sides)
- ⊙ The drought (instinct: to deplete resources)
- ⊙ Quicksilver taint (instinct: to cause delusions)
- ⊙ "A woman's place" (instinct: to place limitations, on everyone)
- ⊙ Resentment toward the Hillfolk (instinct: to prevent cooperation)
- ⊙ The slave trade (instinct: to deny humanity)

THREAT TYPE

Beast

Beasts are monsters, animals, or NPCs driven by basic need and instinct.

Most often, they're literally beasts (natural or not). They might be smart, maybe as smart or smarter than most people, but they go around following their stomach or their loins or their big stupid ego.

A *beast* threat could reflect a single, specific creature, a family/pack/herd, or even an entire species.

GM moves for beasts:

- Show up where it's not wanted
- Stalk or pursue prey
- Protect its home or family
- Make a show of strength, aggression
- Build or expand a nest/den/lair
- Modify its environment
- Flee or panic or rage
- Consume something (or someone)
- Grow or diminish, in size or numbers

Example beasts:

- ⊙ The cave bears (instinct: to fill their bellies, protect their young)
- ⊙ The wisent herd, protected by a pact with the PCs (instinct: to act with impunity)
- ⊙ Grigor Rocksplitter (instinct: to make sure everyone knows how great he is)
- ⊙ The frythrancs (instinct: to dominate their territory)
- ⊙ The nailadd swarm (instinct: to breed and spread out)
- ⊙ Orub the Hagr (instinct: to compulsively shape his environment)

THREAT TYPE

Institution

Institutions are people, groups, or positions that have power within a community (or multiple communities). They could be formal things, like a cult or a government, or just positions of respect (like a council of elders). An institution often has a specific leader, but not always.

An *institution* transcends the individuals who comprise it, and its instinct reflects the purpose or behavior of the institution as a whole. But it acts via individuals, usually ones invested in its continuing influence.

GM moves for *institutions*:

- Sway public opinion
- Put someone in their place
- Change a rule, law, or custom
- Acquire leverage, resources, influence
- Denounce something or someone
- Support a course of action
- Recruit new members or minions
- Squabble amongst themselves
- Change leadership
- Negotiate a deal or treaty
- Send someone else to do their dirty work

Example *institutions*:

- ⊙ Aratis's priesthood (instinct: to preserve civilization, at all costs)
- ⊙ Marshedge Town Council (instinct: to maintain the status quo)
- ⊙ The Cult of Azm Har (instinct: to hoard knowledge, power, people)
- ⊙ The nascent town council (instinct: to keep the PCs in check)
- ⊙ The Ferrite Union (instinct: to undermine the Bosses' control)

THREAT TYPE

MacGuffin

MacGuffins are things—objects, places, even secrets—that stir up conflict. A *MacGuffin* might have power to cause trouble itself, or it could simply be something valuable that gets people fighting over it.

If there's a thing in your game that you think is a source of trouble, it's probably a *MacGuffin*.

When choosing an instinct for a *MacGuffin*, focus on how it causes trouble rather than what it does. The aetherium weather vane adjusts the weather, but it's a threat because others covet it.

GM moves for *MacGuffins*:

- Reveal a secret
- Draw attention to itself
- Point to something else
- Generate envy/fear/discord
- Weigh heavily, become a burden
- Be the target of theft
- Go missing
- Perform its function, heedlessly
- Fail at the worst possible moment
- Leave its mark on someone or thing
- Become something greater, or lesser

Example *MacGuffins*:

- ⊙ The Chronicle's vault of artifacts (instinct: to harbor badness)
- ⊙ The Lore Tree of Yevana (instinct: to reveal dangerous secrets)
- ⊙ The Blood-Quenched Sword (instinct: to encourage violence)
- ⊙ The aetherium weather vane (instinct: to inspire jealousy)

Threats

THREAT TYPE

Magical entity

Magical entities include spirits, many fae, the Things Below, even gods or their agents. They are beings that live and breathe magic and power, for whom mundane concerns like food and shelter are alien or superfluous.

Magical entities are often bound by strange, seemingly arbitrary limitations and laws. They must often act on the world subtly or through intermediaries.

GM moves for *magical entities*:

- Spy on someone, unseen/from afar
- Sense powerful longings/emotions
- Appear in glimpses, dreams, visions
- Offer service, secrets, power
- Demand an oath or sacrifice
- Lay a curse
- Twist a bargain to its favor
- Send forth minions to do its bidding
- Shape its environs, per its nature
- Pursue alien goals
- Foster rivalries with similar powers
- Grow or diminish in strength

Example *magical entities*:

- ⊙ Hec'tumel, Slithering One! Pale Serpent! Death Is Its Eyes! (instinct: to smother life, hope, and light)
- ⊙ Mother-of-Spiders (instinct: to see her many children spread)
- ⊙ False idol spirit (instinct: to break free of its bondage)
- ⊙ Nectarsweet the fae (instinct: to be adored)
- ⊙ The shade of Nikalor (instinct: to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh)
- ⊙ Yevena, mummified Green Lord (instinct: to preserve its glorious afterlife)

THREAT TYPE

Rabble

A *rabble* is a group, with or without a leader, united by emotion, blood, or circumstance rather than by any sort of common purpose or goal.

A *rabble's* instinct represents how the group as a whole behaves. Any given individual within the group might not share the instinct and might even oppose it.

GM moves for *rabble*:

- Grow or gather in numbers
- Claim territory or resources
- Fall under a (new) leader's sway
- Undergo internal turmoil
- Make a show of strength/numbers
- Declare an enemy or an alliance
- Turn on one of their own
- Overwhelm a position or a weaker group
- Despoil, loot, pillage, burn
- Refuse to be controlled/contained
- Disperse, scatter, flee

Example *rabble*:

- ⊙ Hillfolk refugees (instinct: to not fit in)
- ⊙ The slave rebellion (instinct: to throw off their shackles)
- ⊙ Daedre the Red's bandits (instinct: to do whatever the hell they want)
- ⊙ The Seven Brothers, fae revellers (instinct: to drag others into their wanton excess)
- ⊙ Heledd's family (instinct: to close ranks and protect their own)
- ⊙ The secret cult of the false idol (instinct: to pursue power, fortune, and respect)

THREAT TYPE

Villain

Villains are just the worst. They are individuals with the ruthlessness, drive, and power to make life awful for any number of other people.

Villains often act via minions or intermediaries. When they get involved directly, they always try to act from a position of strength or personal safety. They often have a backup plan or two.

GM moves for *villains*:

- Grasp power, recklessly
- Gain followers or allies
- Find someone's weakness
- Make an offer, with strings attached
- Demand concessions, obedience, or respect
- Make threats, veiled or not
- Outmaneuver their enemies
- Attack cautiously, holding reserves
- Attack ruthlessly, with little warning
- Reveal preparations made in advance
- Sacrifice another to advance a goal
- Betray an ally or a trust
- Take a prisoner
- Do the unthinkable

Example *villains*:

- ⊙ Brennan (instinct: to maintain or increase his power)
- ⊙ Marc, Hillfolk slaver (instinct: to glorify himself and his clan)
- ⊙ Iwan, schmuck-turned-sorcerer (instinct: to get what he thinks the world owes him)
- ⊙ The Eyeless Crinwin (instinct: to set free the Living Darkness)
- ⊙ Mozairog Mind-on-Fire (instinct: to return the Fomoraig to glory)

THREAT TYPE

Wildcard

Wildcards are individuals who cause trouble because they're a mystery. Or because the PCs care about them but can't trust them. Or because they're opposed to the PCs, but aren't necessarily bad people. If you feel like an NPC is a threat, but none of the other threat types seem to fit, make them a *wildcard*.

Make "triangles" between *wildcards* and the PCs. Play up the old friendship between the Heavy and Esylt the town busybody. Then have Esylt undermine the Judge's authority, sit back, and watch the sparks fly.

GM moves for *wildcards*:

- Aggressively pursue their instinct
- Show their worth, or lack thereof
- Display the contents of their heart
- Provide advice/aid, wanted or not
- Reveal a secret, or keep one closely
- Draw attention to themselves/others
- Appear unannounced
- Act strangely (for them)
- Bear witness
- Tell stories (true or not)
- Make/keep/break/demand a promise
- Force an issue or a confrontation
- Stand resolute and refuse to budge

Example *wildcards*:

- ⊙ Esylt, the town busybody (instinct: to cling to how things "should" be)
- ⊙ Afon, fae-touched Initiate of Danu (instinct: to act impulsively)
- ⊙ Andras (instinct: to try to impress Rhianna and Blodwen)
- ⊙ Muirdoc, the pretty boy (instinct: to toy with hearts)

Threats

2 Threat tracker

Your GM Playbook has three spreads for tracking threats:

- ⊙ **Homefront threats**, for NPCs or groups that live in town, for afflictions that directly affect them, or for anything else located there.
- ⊙ **Nearby threats**, for threats that dwell within a couple days travel of home.
- ⊙ **Distant threats**, for anything further than that.

Pick the corresponding tracker. Add the threat's name, maybe a quick descriptor (e.g., "Sawyl, disgruntled hunter"), followed by its type in parentheses. Draw a line from the name to its location on the threat tracker's map.

As you continue to write up this threat, you might find it useful to add key details to the tracker (like its instinct or maybe a stakes question). Keep it short and simple, though. You won't be able to fit the full write-up for every threat.

Sajra's lair is a Maker-ruin about a day and a half from town in the Great Wood, so I add it to the Nearby Threats tracker, on the right hand side. I write down "Sajra the Swyn (villain)" and draw a line to a likely spot in the woods.

3 Instinct

Every threat has an **instinct**, written in the format "to <do something>." This is the primary behavior that makes it a problem, that causes it to come into conflict with or harm others. If it didn't have this instinct, it wouldn't be a threat.

Many other game elements (like dangers and some NPCs) will already have an instinct assigned. If such an element becomes a long-term threat, then either use its existing instinct or write up a new instinct to reflect how its typical behavior has changed or become more problematic.

If you're writing up a threat that doesn't have an instinct yet (like a curse, or some NPC you just made up), decide on its instinct now. See the descriptions of each threat type for examples.

Whatever instinct you chose, write it down in your notes, under the threat's name type. If you think it'll be helpful, and you have space, add it to the threat tracker, too.

According to the bestiary, a swyn's instinct is "to indulge its ego." That's perfectly horrid, and can lead to all sorts of villainous behavior (like collecting children). I reuse that for this specific threat's instinct.

Instincts in play

Use a threat's instinct to guide how it behaves and reacts. If you're unsure what a threat would do, look to its instinct. Have it do that.

When doing prep, use a threat's instinct to inform the sort of trouble it causes and to help you frame your adventure hooks.

4 Description

Jot down some notes, including any or all of the following that seem important:

- ⊙ Who or what the threat is.
- ⊙ How it came to be a problem for the PCs, or how they first encountered it.
- ⊙ Its relationship(s) to NPCs, monsters, points of interest, or other threats.

These notes are for your benefit, so write only what's useful to you, what you want to remind yourself of later. Don't waste time or space on stuff that's obvious (to you).

Sometimes, you'll be writing up a threat and realize that it's made up of (or commands) lesser threats. When that happens, either...

- ... fully write up that other threat, as its own entry on the threat tracker and in your notes; or...
- ... pick a type and instinct for the lesser threat, and include them (in parentheses) as part of the main threat's description.

When writing a threat's description, you might identify blanks—details that haven't been established yet. When you notice such a blank, either fill it in now (with whatever makes sense) or choose to leave it as a blank that will get filled in during play.

I know that Sajra is a swyn, and I know what a swyn is, so I don't bother putting that in its description. I do note that it's dwelling in an old Maker-ruin, that it commands the crinwin, and that it collects children (including Caradoc's nephew).

As I make notes, I realize that I have some blanks. What is the nature of the Maker-ruin? Why has Sajra become a threat NOW, when it wasn't a threat just a few months ago? What other children does it have?

I decide that it's already abducted one or two other children, but I'll ask the players who has been taken. As for the Maker-ruin, I really like the idea that it's a mummy-tomb for one of the Green Lords. So, either Sajra was in stasis in that tomb and recently released, or it just moved there from some place further in the Wood. I can't imagine a Green Lord choosing to spend eternity with such a foul, overbearing creature, so I think Sajra must have moved in recently. Which prompts another question: what drove it here? I don't feel a need to answer that just yet, so I leave it as blank.

I had already established the crinwin as a threat (a rabble, instinct: to covet) when reviewing my notes after character creation. They're subservient to Sajra, though, so I don't think they warrant a full write-up (yet).

At this point, my write-up looks like this:

SAJRA THE SWYN (villain)

Instinct: to indulge its ego

Recently moved into a ruined Green Lord's tomb about 1½ days from town (from where?). Has dominated a few nests of **crinwin** (rabble, to covet); they've been stealing children for it. Has Wynfor (Caradoc's nephew) and another child (who?).

Threats

5 Impending doom

If the threat has momentum—if it's changing, pursuing an agenda, or getting worse—then ask yourself: what irrevocable bad thing that will happen if it proceeds unchecked? That is its **impending doom**.

An impending doom doesn't have to be world-shaking or terrible. It could be as petty as "Elios leaves Dilwen, and Dilwen never forgives Rhianna."

Of course, an impending doom *can* be world-shaking and terrible: "The Fomoraig rise and wage war on the fae." Or: "Barrier Pass falls and the hordes sweep south."

The key thing about an impending doom is that it's irreversible. Once it's happened, there's no going back. It will fundamentally change the threat and the things it affects. The PCs might convince Elios to return, but the relationship is broken now and Dilwen still won't forgive Rhianna. They might end the Fomoraig-fae war, but the Great Wood has still been ravaged by the conflict.

Don't overthink it! Just ask yourself: "Where is this going?" and write that down. If you can't think of something, that's fine! Not all threats have an impending doom. If a doom occurs to you later, you can always come back and add it to the threat.

Sajra is newly arrived to the area, and it's assembling servants (the crimwin) and collecting children. It's driven by its terrible ego, and wants to be adored. If left unchecked, Sajra will eventually try to take control of Stonetop. And if the PCs don't stop it, Sajra will succeed. So her impending doom is: "Subjugates the people of Stonetop."

Grim portents

Once you've established that a threat has an impending doom, and what it is, come up with 2-4 grim portents. These are milestones, steps along the way that will demonstrate the threat's progression. Grim portents should be concrete, observable things: things the PCs can see, or get word of, or feel the effects of. And—crucially—grim portents should something the PCs can react to and possibly prevent.

Just to be clear: grim portents are things that happen in the world around the PCs. They are NOT things that the PCs do. "Townfolk form a cult" is a solid grim portent; "the PCs learn who the cultists are" is not. It presumes that the PCs care enough to investigate the cult, that they investigate, and that they succeed. That's not a grim portent—that's a railroad.

Similarly, a grim portent can be an event that involves the PCs, but it should never dictate an outcome. "The cultists attack the PCs in their homes" is a great. You can safely assume the PCs will at some point be home, and who knows how the attack will play out? "The cultists capture the PCs" is not okay, because it assumes that cultists succeed at capturing them. Again, that's a railroad.

Writing grim portents

If you're having trouble coming up with grim portents, look at the GM moves for the threat type. If the threat is a monster or a follower, look at their moves, too. Those moves represent what the threat does and how it causes trouble. Use them—along with the threat's instinct—to inspire your grim portents.

Here's another trick: work backwards. Start at the impending doom, and ask yourself "What discrete, observable event would happen just before this? What would the situation look like?" That becomes the last grim portent. Then, what would happen before that? That's another grim portent. Keep working backward until you have a grim portent that's visible from the current state of things.

As you write your grim portents, you'll probably find yourself changing your mind and maybe even rewriting the impending doom. That's fine! But try to keep things loose; a high-level outline is way more useful and flexible than a detailed plan.

Dooms and portents in play

Grim portents and impending dooms are your plans. They're what will happen unless the PCs intervene.

One of your basic GM moves is **advance towards impending doom**. Look at the grim portents for one of your threats, check the next one off, and show the PCs some sign that it's occurred or occurring. You might make this move when...

- ... **the Seasons Change**, and their roll results in a threat getting worse or threats abounding. In the next session, or during an upcoming scene, show them that grim portent or doom has come to pass.
- ... **the players roll a 6-** and this is the hard move you want to make. You'll often do this for moves that made during loose play (page **XX**), but not always.
- ... **the PCs have spent time away from the area where a threat is active**, and then they return to that area. Show them how things have gotten worse.

The first grim portent for Sajra is obvious to me: more children go missing! But I'm not quite sure what comes next. What are steps between "having crinwin collect children" and "Sajra subjugates Stonetop?"

Working backwards: what would happen just before the town being subjugated?

*Looking at the GM moves for villains, I see **demand concessions, obedience, or respect** and think: it would give the town an ultimatum! Accept it as their master, their god even, or be destroyed. This lines up with its instinct (to **indulge its ego**). It can **turn the weak-willed into fawning servants** (one of its monster moves) but it wants the bulk of the town to recognize its beauty and magnificence and serve willingly. Okay, what would it do before making such an ultimatum? It would **gain followers or allies** in town. How would it do that? Possibly by **finding someone's weakness** and then **making an offer, with strings attached**. But how? Villains usually act through minions or intermediaries... the children! It will send some of the stolen children home, thoroughly under its influence, and have them spy and recruit followers.*

That gives me the following grim portents and impending doom:

- More children go missing.
- Some of the (entranced) children return.
- Children recruit followers.
- Reveals itself, demands servitude.
- **Impending doom:** subjugates the town, killing or mesmerizing any opposition.

Threats

6 Stakes (optional)

Ask yourself some questions about the threat and the people affected by it. What do you wonder about? What do you want to discover in play? These questions become your **stakes**.

You can ask stakes questions about PCs or NPCs, about groups or places or things. They can be about big things, or small, personal things. Whatever you ask about, it should pique your interest and you should be genuinely curious about the answer.

Stakes questions should be about the future, not the past. What *will* happen, not what *has* happened. You might have questions about the past to fill in later, between sessions or during play, but those aren't *stakes*.

Some examples of good stakes questions:

- ⊗ Will Vahid convince Eira to trust him?
- ⊗ Will Elios rise to the occasion?
- ⊗ Who will Mabyn end up with?
- ⊗ Who will die in the coming battle?
- ⊗ Will Tiwlip find her missing dog?
- ⊗ Will the Claws accept Kiran's authority?
- ⊗ Can Ergben be redeemed?

Stakes questions shouldn't boil down to, "Will this grim portent/impending doom come to pass?" You've already answered that! A grim portent or impending doom *will* come to pass unless the PCs prevent it. Ask about things that are uncertain, that haven't been decided.

Not every threat needs stakes. When you first introduce a threat, you might not know (or care) enough to ask them. That's okay! You can add stakes questions later, as the threat evolves or as you become interested. Or a threat might never develop stakes. That's fine, too.

For Sajra the Swyn, I wonder:

- ⊗ *Will Brynfor's parents forgive Caradoc?*
- ⊗ *What will become of the stolen children, the ones brought under Sajra's control?*
- ⊗ *What brought Sajra to move into the Green Lord's tomb, anyway?*

That last one, though, isn't a stakes question—it's a detail about the past. I add the first two to my threat write-up as stakes, and add a question about why Sajra arrived to the description.

Stakes in play

By making something a stakes question, you are resolving not to answer it yourself. Instead, you are disclaiming responsibility, letting yourself be surprised by how things turn out. Here's how you do that.

First and foremost: **put your stakes on screen!** If you wonder whether Nia's link to the spiders can be broken, have Nia's mother show up on the Blessed's doorstep begging her to do "cure" her daughter. Then, do any or all of the following:

- ⊗ **Put it in the PCs' hands.** Tell them the consequences or requirements, and see what they do about it.
- ⊗ **Play NPCs with integrity.** If a stakes questions boils down to "what would this NPC do?" then base your answer on the NPC's instinct, their past actions and relationships, your sense of who this person really *is*. Yes, you're making the decision, but you're basing it on how the NPC would act, rather than on how you want the story to go.

- ◎ **Follow the moves and the dice.** If the PCs trigger a move, and that move can answer a stakes question (or get you closer to an answer), then let it happen. Make the obvious move, the one that moves towards an answer.
- ◎ **Let it simmer.** If you put a stakes question on screen and it doesn't get resolved, it's okay to move on and leave it unanswered. Don't force it. Come back to it later when it makes sense.

The point of this process—writing stakes that you're interested in, putting them on screen, and letting the PCs and your NPCs and the dice resolve them naturally—is to make the game more fulfilling for you. It's a reward to yourself, to say "I wonder, *can* they break Nia's bond to the spiders?" and then let yourself be surprised by the answer.

So there we are, Blodwen's sister at her door, begging Blodwen to "cure" Nia of her link to the spiders. I wonder how it'll turn out!

I start by putting it in the PC's hands. "Blodwen, you could try to Suck the Poison Out. It might cleanse Nia's connection to the spiders, but... it'd be like if someone took away your Spirit Tongue. What do you do?"

Blodwen is willing to try, but not without Nia's consent. She follows her sister home and finds Nia in the corner, playing cats-cradle with a spider, her big tough-guy dad glowering on. Blodwen explains to Nia that the whole spider thing is upsetting her parents, that the link can be broken but she won't do it without Nia's permission.

Nia's instinct is "to befriend spiders," and I think that she likes playing with them. So I play my NPC with integrity and say "But I don't want to lose my friends," all sweet and innocent. "Her mom sobs and her dad chokes up and bites down on his finger."

I'm thinking the issue is settled, but Blodwen presses on. "Your mam and pappy are scared of spiders, Nia, really scared. And it makes them sad and scared when you talk to them. Are you sure you won't reconsider?"

Blodwen's Persuading, so I follow the moves and the dice. She rolls a 7. I have to reveal how Nia could be convinced, but it'll be tricky, costly, or distasteful. "She doesn't want to, but the way her eyes go to her dad, you're sure that if HE said how worried and scared it made him, she'd go along with it. Good luck with that. What do you do?"

Blodwen pulls the parents aside, whispering that they should be honest with Nia, tell her how scared they are and how much they care about her, eyes on Nia's dad the whole time. She's Persuading again, but she gets a 5. Nia's dad loses it, starts yelling at Nia, ordering her to agree. The girl starts crying and runs out of the house and goes to hide some place dark (probably with a lot of spiders).

I still haven't answered the question decisively ("can the link be broken?"), but it won't be answered now. I decide to let it simmer and we'll answer the question later.

Threats

7 GM moves (optional)

If you want to further define how the threat behaves or what it's capable of, pick or write 2-4 GM moves.

Start by looking at the GM moves for the threat's type (page **XX**). If any of them seem particularly appropriate for this threat, add them to its write-up. Likewise, if the threat is also a monster, identify any monster moves that help you understand how it causes trouble over time, and add those to the write-up.

Finally, ask yourself if there's anything that you think this threat can or will do that isn't clearly defined, and that you want to remind yourself of or give yourself permission to do. Write these as GM moves, so that they complete the sentence: "the threat can/will ____."

8 Player moves (optional)

Sometimes a threat will suggest a unique player-facing move, one that's only triggered when interacting with the threat, its minions, or its domain. For example, "When you remove a canopic jar from the sarcophagus, roll +CHA...."

If a threat is also a monster, a hazard, an artifact or arcanum, it might already have some player-facing moves associated with it. Add these moves (or a reminder about them) to your notes if you think it'll be helpful.

Not every threat calls for custom moves. Don't bother writing one up unless it adds value.

See the **Making Stonetop Yours** chapter for guidance on writing custom player-facing moves.

As a monster, Sajra already has GM moves and even a player-facing move for "When the swyn compels you to act against your will...." Most of these will be relevant only when the PCs face Sajra directly, at which point I'll have its monster stats handy. But a couple of its GM moves describe its capabilities as a big-picture threat, so I add those to my write-up. My threat now looks like this:

SAJRA THE SWYN (villain)

Instinct: to indulge its ego

Recently moved into a ruined Green Lord's tomb about 1½ days from town (from where and why?). Has dominated a few nests of **crinwin** (rabble; to covet); they've been stealing children for it. Has Wynfor (Caradoc's nephew) and another child (who?).

- More children go missing.
- Some of the (entranced) children return.
- Children recruit followers.
- Reveals itself, demands servitude.
- **Impending doom:** subjugates the town, killing or mesmerizing any opposition.

Stakes: Will Brynfor's parents forgive Caradoc? What will become of the stolen children brought under Sajra's control?

GM moves:

- Plant a suggestion in another's mind
- Turn the weak-willed into fawning servants

Example threats

The threats here and on the following pages are more examples. These threats might not exist in your game, and if they do, they might look very different. Use them as inspiration, nothing more.

TEGWEN (*wildcard*)

Instinct: to undermine others' worth

Blodwen's mother, jealous of her importance to the village and her relationship with Gwendyl and Seren. Resents Rhianna. Distrusts Vahid. Thinks Caradoc is a fool.

Stakes: How far will she go to control Blodwen? How much will Blodwen put up with?

GM moves:

- Provide (unwanted?) advice or aid
- Force an issue or a confrontation
- Wield guilt like a weapon

GARET'S WOUND (*affliction*)

Instinct: to keep Gareth in danger

Garet's leg got mauled by feathered drakes; Blodwen patched him up but he's still walking on it. Could get bad.

- Wound isn't healing well, Gareth is weak and slow.
- Wound gets infected, needs to be amputated.
- Gareth becomes feverish, delirious.
- **Impending doom:** Gareth dies.

Stakes: What decisions will Rhianna make? How will Blodwen handle it?

MUTRA THE TEETH (*villain*)

Instinct: to acquire

A boss in Gordin's Delve. His crews mine, salvage artifacts. Bought Green Lord stuff from Vahid, Rhianna; wants to know/acquire more.

- Pays merchants, travelers to scope out Stonetop
- Embeds agent(s) in Stonetop
- Agent(s) identify key treasure(s)
- Mutra demands treasure(s) for a pittance, or else
- **Impending doom:** Agent(s) kill someone, steal treasure(s)

GM moves:

- Interrupt trade with Gordin's Delve
- Turn old allies against Stonetop

CRINWIN (*rabble*)

Instinct: to covet humanity

Free of Sajra's control, they've become more obsessed with Stonetop.

- Establish nests closer to town.
- Attack lone villagers in the Wood.
- Start killing livestock and stealing stuff from the village at night.
- More/bigger nests nearby, anyone in the Wood is attacked/kidnapped
- **Impending doom:** crinwin invade, move in, and imprison survivors

When you **Deploy the village militia against crinwin raids**, add this to the list of choices for a 7-9:

- The crinwin steal 1d4 Surplus
- A important item goes missing

Threats

THE PALE CRINWIN (*wildcard*)

Instinct: to learn more and more

A curious, “friendly” crinwin somewhat exiled from its peers. Vahid communicated with “him,” sort of. Its fascinated with writing, drawings.

Stakes: Will the PCs figure out how to reliably communicate with “him?” Will the villagers accept crinwin as anything but vermin or monsters?

When you *try to communicate with the pale crinwin through noises or pantomime*, describe what you’re trying to convey and roll +INT: **on a 10+**, message received; **on a 7-9**, he gets the gist but not the details; **on a 6-**, hoo boy does he get it wrong.

NAILADD SWARM (*beasts*)

Instinct: to breed and spread out.

Giant spiders, spreading out via the waystones at the behest of the Mother-of-Spiders.

- Nearest waystone is infested, nailadd hunting near Stonetop.
- Game is scarce, hunters/trappers are attacked, stay in town.
- Spiders raid Stonetop, killing some, dragging off others.
- **Impending doom:** Overrun and infest the village!

Stakes: Will Blodwen bring herself to help kill them? Will Andras overcome his fear of spiders?

FARMERS GUILD (*rabble*)

Instinct: to improve their lot in life

Idealists led by Dermos and Tierney, maybe 100 backers. Want a spot on the Marshedge town council to start.

- Council refuses to recognize them.
- Guild organizes a strike in protest
- Brennan has Claws/new recruits break strike, kill Dermos/Tierney
- Resentment grows, loyalists from the watch side with farmers
- **Impending doom:** Riots, looting, killing, Marshedge in flames.

Stakes: Will Dermos and Brin get together? Will Kiran follow orders or his conscience?

THE MARSHEDGE COUNCIL (*institution*)

Instinct: to preserve the status quo.

The head of each guild (including the fen-walkers) and a rep from each of the Old Families. **Brennan** isn’t on the council but he surely influences it.

GM moves:

- Cut off Stonetop’s supply of something
- Stall, bicker, refuse to make decisions

THE WHITE HAND (*institution*)

Instinct: to contain the evil of the lakes, no matter what it takes

A holy sect of Hillfolk who patrol the Steplands.

Stakes: How will the PCs react to them, if they learn of their purpose?

GM moves:

- Denounce trespassers as unclean
- Sense the taint of corruption
- Spread word among the Hillfolk
- Outmaneuver their prey

THE MINDGEM'S HEART

(*maguffin*)

Instinct: to empower, ignite, awaken

A chunk of makerglass that burns with terrible heat, recovered from Three-Coven Lake. Currently kept in Vahid's kiln.

Stakes: What will Vahid do with the Heart? How will Maire react to its presence in Vahid's house?

GM moves:

- Perform its function, heedlessly
- Draw attention to itself
- Catch something on fire
- Provide a potent supply of magical energy

TRADE EMBARGO

(*affliction*)

Instinct: to punish Stonetop

After the PCs sided with the Farmers Guild, Brennan had the council cut off trade with Stonetop.

When you *Outfit from Stonetop*, start with 1 fewer small items than normal, and supplies each have 1 fewer use.

When you *Recover using supplies from Stonetop*, you or your patient recover 1 HP less than normal.

When you *Trade or Barter for anything that would come through Marshedge*, you have disadvantage.

THE SHADOWY PRESENCE

(*magical entity*)

Instinct: to devour life, light, warmth

The wraith of a Green Lord. Bound beneath that mound the PCs found near the spider ziggurat. It tasted Caradoc's blood, so he's tied to it. Awakened by the Mindgem's Heart.

- Earthquake sets it free
- Rampages through Great Wood, mindlessly stalking/feeding
- Catches "scent" of the Heart, moves towards Stonetop
- Starts attacking villagers at night
- **Impending doom:** Devours the Heart, becoming a permanent vortex of death and darkness

Stakes: How will its link to Caradoc affect what happens?

Updating threats

Threats change over time. Between each session, review your threats and update them as needed. For each threat, if...

- ... **it's no longer a threat** (because it's dead, it's left, the conflict has been resolved, etc.), then cross it off the threat tracker;
- ... **its threat type no longer rings true** (because you got it wrong, or because its nature has changed), then pick a new one;
- ... **its instinct no longer rings true or has changed**, then revise it;
- ... **there's something new that you want to remember**, then add that to its description;
- ... **any of its grim portents have come to pass**, then tick them off;
- ... **the PCs foiled it or changed its course**, then update its grim portents and impending doom appropriately, or cross them off if the doom has been completely averted;
- ... **it's moving towards something bad** (but it wasn't before), then write an impending doom and grim portents;
- ... **any of its stakes questions were answered**, or are no longer relevant, cross them off;
- ... **there's something new that you wonder about and that interests you**, then write a new stakes question;
- ... **its behavior or capabilities have changed** (or been revealed), then write some new GM moves for it; and/or
- ... **it moved closer or farther away**, then move it from one threat tracker to another.



Consider also: did you introduce any new threats in play? Were there any new enemies or rivals? Any monsters that might return to cause trouble later? NPCs who the PCs can't trust? Groups in conflict, with the PCs or with the status quo? Did you introduce any difficult circumstances that will worsen or at least persist? Did the PCs acquire anything that others really want, or that will draw attention, or just cause trouble by itself? Write them up as threats.

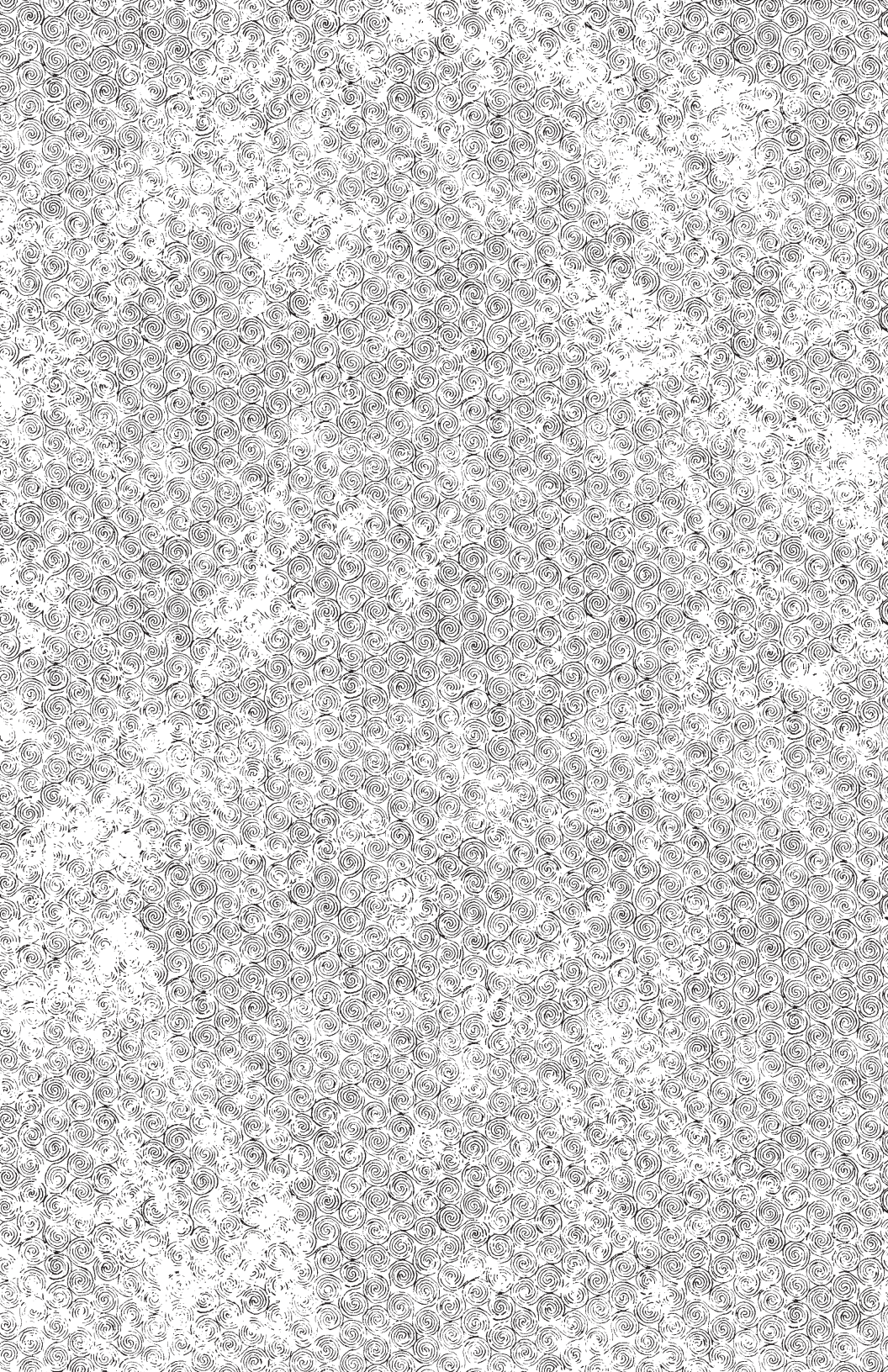


We just finished our first session of actual play. Rheinal stumbled home. The crinwin abducted Pryder. The PCs organized an expedition to rescue him. There was a fair bit of interaction with the NPCs in town, and no small amount of drama.

I had previously written up Tegwen, Blodwen's mother, as a wildcard threat ("to nitpick and snipe"). But in play, I found myself portraying her as much nastier, more abusive and manipulative. Blodwen's player was on board with that, so I update her instinct to be "to undermine others' value," I make note of her attitude towards the various PCs, and I write some stakes questions ("How far will she go to control Blodwen? How much will Blodwen put up with?").

During that first session of play, we also met Owain, whose daughter disappeared the previous winter. He and Glenys (Caradoc's aunt and mother of Wynfor, who was abducted in the late-winter crinwin raid) were bitter and nasty towards the PCs, especially Rhianna.

I start writing them up as a rabble threat, but when I look at the threat moves, I realize that no, the parents aren't the threat. The threat is "Distrust of the PCs," an affliction, and the parents are just wrapped up in it. I write it up as a threat (instinct: "to fester"). I don't have a sense for where this is going just yet, so I don't write an impending doom. But I am curious: Can Rhianna regain Owain and Glenys's respect? Will Glenys ever forgive Caradoc? I write those down as stakes questions.



Expeditions



Preparations
Running the journey
PC moves
Going home
What to prep

Expeditions

The characters decide to leave town. Maybe you've presented a threat and they're off to deal with it. Maybe you've dangled an opportunity and they want to seize it. Maybe they have plans of their own, something they want to accomplish, and it involves leaving home. It's time for an expedition.

Before the players leave town and head out into the wild, they'll make preparations: they **Chart a Course**, **Outfit**, and maybe **Requisition**, and do whatever else they need to do before leaving home.

Once they're ready, they'll head out. You'll establish new situations as they move from place to place, make soft GM moves to prompt decisions and introduce challenges, and ask them, "What do you do?" You'll resolve the PC's actions, using the basic player moves and the expedition moves (described later in this chapter).

They'll eventually move on. You'll transition to the next landmark or challenge. You'll establish the situation there and repeat the process.

They might reach their destination with ease. Or, they might get lost. They might encounter something that distracts them from their goal. They might get beaten up so badly that they turn back and head home in defeat. It's all good—**play to find out what happens**.

Travel is an important part of *Stonetop*. It's a chance to flesh out and explore the wider world. It's dangerous and hard, which reinforces the importance of home and its relative safety. Travel isn't something to gloss over. Give it the screen time it deserves!

Preparations

CHART A COURSE

When you *wish to travel to a distant place*, name or describe your destination ("Gordin's Delve," "the hagr's lair," or "wherever these tracks lead"). If the route is unclear, tell the GM how you intend to reach it. The GM will then tell you what's required, the risks, and how long it will likely take.

When you *set out on the journey*, the GM will present each of the challenges one at a time—plus any surprises that you couldn't have seen coming—in whatever order makes the most sense. Address them all and reach your destination.

When the players start talking about leaving town, direct them to this move. Use it to clarify their destination and how they intend to get there. If they have no ideas, prompt them to Know Things. Their route doesn't need to be perfectly clear—something like, "We follow the tracks" is fine—but they should have some idea of where they're going and how they're going to get there.

Once they've established their destination and route, tell them as many of the following as make sense. Make your choices based on the seasons, the terrain, how well they know the area, the dangers that lurk there, the threats you've established and their grim portents. Don't worry so much about the order right now, and feel free to rephrase or tweak the wording. If it makes sense, add entirely new items.

- ⊙ You must first travel to ____, and from there to your destination
- ⊙ You must wait until ____
- ⊙ You need a knowledgeable guide/accurate map/detailed directions
- ⊙ You'll need to bring ____
- ⊙ You need to watch out for ____
- ⊙ The way is perilous, plagued with dangers
- ⊙ You risk getting lost
- ⊙ You must surmount/cross/brave ____ on the way
- ⊙ The terrain itself is treacherous; you risk injury on the way
- ⊙ The way will be hard and grueling; you risk exhausting yourselves or your resources
- ⊙ You risk drawing the attention of ____
- ⊙ It'll take at least ____ days (and a corresponding amount of supplies)
- ⊙ You don't know how long it'll take

You'll usually link these with "and" but can also use a merciful "or." "You'll need to bring warm clothes OR the way will be hard and grueling." "You need to wait until daybreak OR you risk getting lost."

If you choose "First you must travel to ____, " then Chart a Course for each leg of the journey. You can nest this requirement two or three levels deep. A journey to Lygos might require traveling to Marshedge, and from there to the arid South, and from there to Lygos proper.

Answer whatever questions the players have. Clarify your statements. Don't be afraid to negotiate or change your mind.

Write your choices down with tick boxes next to them. Ideally, put this someplace public so the players can see it, too. This will help the players make preparations, and it'll serve as your narrative to-do list once the journey starts.

As the PCs Outfit or otherwise prepare, **remind them of the requirements.** "Does everyone have something *warm*, like a cloak or thick hides?" "You'll need to bring a horse and cart—someone's going to need to Requisition for that." "You still need to find a guide, a map, or accurate directions... how do you go about that?"

If they fail (or refuse) to meet the requirements, **tell them the consequences** and ask what they do. "Okay, without a guide, you'll risk getting lost." "Okay, but without enough supplies, you'll definitely need to Forage, and that's both time-consuming and risky." "Okay, but without warm clothes you will probably freeze to death. What do you do?" Sometimes, they'll fail to meet the requirements and call the journey off.

Once they set out on the journey, you'll frame scenes and situations that show them traveling and approaching their destination. During some of those scenes, you'll make GM moves that introduce the challenges you outlined. You'll ask the players what they do, resolve the situation, and—assuming the PCs keep going—move on to the next one. See **Running the Journey** (page **XX**).



“... a corresponding amount of supplies”

“Supplies” are something characters can have in their inventory. They represent stuff that the PCs might need or want on an expedition: food, water, whisky, bandages, salves, etc. The steading’s Prosperity stat affects the quality and quantity of supplies available to the PCs; they add the steading’s Prosperity to the number of uses they get out of each ♥ of supplies.

Supplies get used when...

- ... they Recover (see page XX);
- ... they Make Camp (see pages XX and XX);
- ... they Have What They Need (see page XX) to produce additional *small* items; and
- ... you **use up their resources**, and supplies are what you use up.

By default, each person in the party consumes 1 use of supplies per day. But if someone has and uses a ♦ mess kit (which requires water and fire) then 1 use of supplies can cover up to four people.

In other words, when they use a mess kit...

- ... a party of up to 4 will expend 1 use of supplies per day;
- ... a party of 5-8 will expend 2 uses of supplies per day; or
- ... a party of 9-12 will expend 3 uses of supplies per day.

If they don’t use a mess kit, each party member will expend 1 use of supplies per day. Obviously, it’s very favorable to bring and use a mess kit!

Pack animals can graze or browse, and carry enough extra feed to “cover” themselves. Use your best judgement for other animals. The Ranger’s pet wolf can probably fend for itself, and small critters don’t need much food, but well-heeled hounds probably need to be fed from the party’s supplies.

If the party travels with a pack animal or a cart laden with at least 1 Surplus worth of supplies, then there’s no need to track individual meals and uses. As long as they have access to their stash, they can effectively re-Outfit out if it.

Winter has been brutal and Stonetop is running out of food. Rhianna and Caradoc decide to go hunt the cave bears south of town, despite Blodwen's reservations. "Sounds like you're Charting a Course," I say. "How do you intend to get there?"

Rhianna: "Their lair is a cave in the bluff, right? If we follow the bluff south, we'll find them."

I look at the list and jot down:

- It'll take at least 1 day there and back (little need to worry about supplies)
- You'll need to bring at least 3 sledges to haul the meat home, if you want enough to feed everyone
- You'll need to bring warm clothes
- You'll need to watch out for crinwin
- The way is grueling (cold, snow)
- You risk getting lost
- You risk drawing the attention of the cave bears as you approach!

I read these off and Rhianna's like, "We risk getting lost? We're just following the cliff face south." Oh, sure. Of course. I cross it off the list.



Vabid convinces the others to visit Three-Coven Lake in search of the Mindgem's ever-burning heart. "Just the four us," says Rhianna. "I'm not risking my crew on this." Andras insists on coming, though—mostly because he's sweet on Blodwen.

"How do you intend to get there?" I ask. They'll take the Highway to Marshedge, resupply there, then follow the Sruth upstream to Three-Coven Lake. That seems legit, so I look over the list and write down:

- First, you'll need to travel to Marshedge
 - You need to wait until summer OR you'll need to bring warm clothes
 - It'll take at least 8 days (and 8 uses of supplies each, or 16 uses total if you use a mess kit)
 - You need to watch out for nosgolau
- It'll take at least 4 days from Marshedge, and a corresponding number of supplies
- You need a knowledgeable guide OR you risk getting lost
- The way is perilous, plagued with danger
- The terrain is treacherous; you risk injury
- The way is grueling; you risk exhaustion

Vabid asks why they need a guide, given that they'll just be heading upstream. "Well," I say, "The terrain's pretty rugged. There will be places you can't stick to the river, and who knows how many little tributaries feed it."

"Hmm. I did spend time wandering the Steplands before I got to Stonetop. Maybe I've got the lay of the land?"

"Maybe. But you've never actually been to the lake, right? So you still risk getting lost."

"Ah," Vabid says. "Yeah, that makes sense."

Expeditions

OUTFIT

When you *prepare for an expedition in a friendly community*, mark as many ◇ on your Inventory insert as you wish to carry, either on specific items or in “undefined.” Mark up to 3 ◇ for a *light* load (quick and quiet), 4–6 ◇ for a *normal* load, or 7–9 ◇ for *heavy* load (noisy, slow, quick to tire). Also, mark a number of □ in the **Small Items** section equal to 4+Prosperity (again, on specific items or in Undefined).

You can select:

- ◎ Items printed on the Inventory sheet
- ◎ Other common, mundane items
- ◎ Any of your personal possessions
- ◎ Special items for which you Trade & Barter

Tell the GM what you’re bringing and answer their questions about your gear and where you got it.

When a player Outfits, they decide how many ◇ to mark on their Inventory insert, and thus how heavy a load they’ll carry. Some playbook moves only work with a certain load or lighter, but mostly a character’s load just informs the fiction and your GM moves. “The slope’s steep, but with plenty of handholds. It’s no problem unless you’ve got a heavy load—then you’ll be Defying Danger. What do you do?”

Small items don’t count towards a character’s load. They’re things that could fit in a purse or boot with room to spare—some coins, a tinderbox, a knife, etc. The player can mark a number of □ in Small items equal to 4 + the steading’s Prosperity.

Players can put as many of their marks in the “undefined” sections as they like. They can then Have What You Need (page XX) during the expedition to transfer those undefined marks to specific items. Yes, it’s a good idea for players to leave their inventory as “undefined” as possible, only declaring specific items as they need or want them.

Players might pick specific items because they know that they’ll need them (for example, if they Charted a Course and you told them they’d need to bring *warm* clothes) or just because they’re sure that they’ll want them (like a Ranger’s bow).

Items printed on the Inventory sheets are things that any PC has access to and that would be useful on an expedition. PCs can also bring personal possessions: the special possessions that they picked at character creation, special items that they’ve acquired via Trade & Barter (page XX), gifts they’ve received from others, or items acquired in the field. They can also pick any common, mundane item that everyone agrees would be available in a small iron-age village (a bucket, some seed, a wooden spoon, a basket, etc.).

Followers need to Outfit, too! You might tell their player what they bring, or have the player decide.

Have everyone announce their load and any specific items they’re bringing. Ask about their choices! Maybe frame little scenes, using this move to show what NPCs think of them. Maybe the party’s lunch gets packed up by the missing boy’s kin. Maybe the smith gives the Would-be Hero a dagger as a sign of respect. Or maybe they have a spat with their mom over taking their dead father’s shield. **Bring it home!**

Rhianna says "Okay, let's get us some bears. The four of us and my crew. Plus Andras, the new kid, to see if he works out. Outfit?"

"Sure," I say. "Don't forget, you'll need warm clothes. And at least three sledges."

Rhianna looks at her Inventory sheet. She knows she'll want her ♥ longbow and a ♥ wool cloak. She'll also carry a ♥♥ sledge, putting her at 4 ♥ total. That's a normal load already, so she marks 2 ♥ in undefined for a total of 6 ♥. She puts all 4 of her small item marks in undefined.

Rhianna also Outfits for her crew. They'll each carry a normal load, with a ♥ bow and iron arrows, ♥♥ thick hides, and 3 ♥ undefined. "There are six of them, including Andras. Some of them will have sledges... we'll figure out how many later."

Blodwen takes a normal load: ♥♥ thick hides, a ♥ staff, and 3 ♥ undefined. She puts all 4 of her small item marks in undefined. She's got her sacred pouch, of course, but it doesn't take up space in her inventory.

Vahid decides to take a heavy load: the ♥♥ Mindgem, a ♥ wool cloak, the ♥ Six Locks of Sajua, and 5 ♥ undefined.

Rhianna's unhappy about how much crap he's carrying. "Magpie" he says, with a smile and shrug. For small items, he marks his Ward of Still Waters and 3 in undefined.

Caradoc brings a normal load: the same ♥ spear and ♥♥ shield he brought on the last expedition, a ♥ cloak, and 2 ♥ undefined. He puts all 4 small item marks in undefined.

This is the first time Caradoc has brought a cloak on an expedition—it was a bit of a thing in the last adventure that he didn't have one. So I ask, "Where did you get that cloak, Caradoc?"

"Um... from Morwena, I think?"

"Oh, totally! She catches you in the square as the crew is gathering. She's got a bundle under her arm and avoids eye contact. 'I... I was weaving this for you... before... and, well, the embroidery on the back isn't done, but if you insist on going out there again... well, you'll need something warm. So... here.' And she blushes and shoves it in your arms and runs off. What do you do?"



Expeditions

REQUISITION

When you *borrow some of the stead-ing's assets for an expedition* (like the horses or a plow), roll +Fortunes: **on a 10+**, go ahead, but bring it back safely; **on a 7-9**, you'll need to do some convincing; **on a 6-**, don't mark XP—you can take the asset with you, but if you do, reduce Fortunes by 1.

At the start of play, Stonetop owns a few communal assets: a couple sturdy draft horses, a pair of carts, a pair of iron plows, and a big wagon. You might also consider some of the main tradesfolk's tools (like the smithy's anvil or the tanner's vats) as town assets.

If the PCs want to take these with them, they must make this move. The stead-ing's Fortunes reflect how likely the other villagers are to let them have their way and put these important assets at risk. If they're borrowing multiple, related assets (like the horses and the wagon), they only need to make this move once.

As always, establish the fiction before triggering the roll. Who are they asking for permission? Who *should* they ask? Who has the right to say "yes?" Who's doing the asking, and how? If the fiction isn't clear, ask questions until it is.

If they want to borrow an asset that's actively needed or in use (e.g. taking the horses and plows during planting, or the horses or carts during harvest), then **tell them the consequences/requirements and ask**. Unless the expedition is urgent and important to the town's survival, they might just need to wait (and shouldn't they be helping in the fields anyhow?).

Players generally don't need to Requisition to access the stead-ing's Surplus, though you might decide that they need to if it'd seem wasteful or overly risky to the rest of town.

A 10+ result means that folks are willing to let them do it, with the expectation that they bring the asset back. It's possible that the characters don't expect that to happen, but as long as they keep up the pretense, they can borrow the asset.

A 7-9 result means that someone voices an objection, but they aren't intractable. Think about why they're objecting (Is the asset needed in town for something? Do they have beef with one of the PCs?) and present that to the players. This will likely lead to a Persuade (or similar) roll. If they convince whoever is objecting, they can borrow the asset (per a 10+).

A 6- means that folks ain't having it. Maybe the asset is currently in use. Maybe Padrig's going to need to haul some goods up to Gordin's Delve and there's no way the PCs will be back in time. Maybe folks are just dead set against the PCs risking such an important asset on one of their damn fool quests.

If the players decide to take the asset anyhow, ask them how they do it. Do they throw their weight around? Do they sneak the asset out in the middle of the night? Whatever they do, they don't need to play out the specifics or make any other rolls as they do it. But it'll harm the town's morale and cohesiveness, reducing Fortunes by 1.

If the PCs borrow an asset and fail to bring it home safely, that almost always counts as Meeting with Disaster (see page XX). Reduce the town's Fortunes by 1 (or more!).

Vahid has convinced Rhianna to do this expedition to Three-Coven Lake. Since they're going through Marshedge, Rhianna's keen to do some trading. "Let's bring my crew, a horse, a cart, and... 3 Surplus? We can trade for a donkey and supplies, and maybe turn a profit on whatever's left. We'll send my crew back with the horse and wagon, and load up our new donkey for the expedition."

"Smart," I say. "But you'll definitely need to wait until summer, then. It's planting season, and the horses are in use. And you'll have to Requisition."

They wait! When the time comes, Rhianna Requisitions. "What's this look like?" I ask. She says that she hinted at the plan to Fion a while back, and as planting finishes, they have a sit-down in the pub. Rhianna rolls +Fortunes (currently +0), with advantage because of her Logistics move.

On a 10+, I'd say how Fion liked the plan, and has a list of things to trade for. On a 7-9, I'd present Fion as suspicious, but give Rhianna a chance to convince her. But Rhianna rolls a 6, even with advantage, and Fion puts her foot down. "Look, I know what this is about. You're going after one of Vahid's unholy trinkets. Well, I can't stop you, but I ain't giving you my blessing. And you'll take one o' the horses over my dead body!"

Rhianna seriously considers going over her head—the trade mission really is a good idea! But, no... the town's Fortunes are only at +0, and they can't really afford a hit right now. "I'm sorry you feel that way, Fion," says Rhianna, raising a cup of whisky. "I guess we'll just do this the hard way."

Other preparations

These might happen before the PCs Outfit and Requisition or after, or sometimes in the middle of making choices.

Zoom in and out as appropriate, switching between loose play and scenes. Gloss over the hours spent interviewing townsfolk, but maybe play out the scene where they interrogate the sketchy newcomer or try to convince the smith to hand over the bronze armor.

You might even jump back and forth in time as they take care of all the details. Don't sweat it.

Trading & bartering

If the PCs want a special item for the trip—like bendis root, a nice lantern, or a bronze weapon—they'll need to Trade & Barter. This takes time. If they're in a rush or have other priorities before they leave, this won't be an option. See the Homefront chapter (page **XX**) for details.

Gathering information

The PCs might have questions they want or need answered before leaving. They could Know Things ("Has anything like this happened before?") or Seek Insight ("I go down and investigate the scene of the attack"). They might interview an NPC to see what they know, and/or use class-specific moves like the Blessed's Call the Spirits.

Reward and encourage research, but keep in mind how long these things take. If they dawdle, **tell them the consequences and ask**. "Yeah, sure, but it'll take a few hours and the longer you wait, the harder it'll be to follow that trail."

Expeditions

Bringing NPCs and followers

Established followers (page **XX**) like the Marshal's crew will usually join an expedition if asked, but they might need convincing if the mission is foolish or against the follower's goals.

Other NPCs might offer to join the PCs, or insist on doing so. If the PCs seek out NPCs to join them, then you might **offer an opportunity** or maybe **introduce someone interesting**. They might Know Things ("Do I know anyone who'd come into the Woods with us?") or Seek Insight ("Who here is useful or valuable to me?"), and/or Persuade ("Rheinal, we need your help"). Candidates could also become apparent through a Muster (see page **XX**), or organically in play.

As always, follow your principles and your sense of the world. **Begin and end with the fiction**, but also **be a fan of the characters** and **ask questions and build on the answers**. "No, there's no alchemist in town. But the tanner sure knows their chemics... what's their name, and how well do you know them?"

If an NPC comes along, and they'll follow the PC's lead, then write them up as followers (page **XX**) with tags, an instinct and cost, HP and damage. Otherwise, just flesh them out as an NPC (page **XX**), in as much or as little detail as you see fit.

Well-trained beasts (like hounds or the town's horses) also count as followers, but livestock like goats and sheep don't. You can tell a good hound what to do. A goat? Not so much.

Followers Outfit just like PCs (page **XX**). You decide what other NPCs bring with them, now or later as you see fit.

Putting others to work

Before they go, the PCs might set the townsfolk to work. For example:

They could Muster (see page **XX**), getting the town ready for trouble. Have them roll before leaving; they'll need to choose "the muster holds together... even without your presence" if they want it to stick while they're gone.

They could Pull Together (see page **XX**), having folks repair the granary or prepare fortifications or whatnot. They should commit resources up front, but shouldn't roll until they head home. That way, the players learn the success of the effort at the same time their characters do.

They might set individuals to a task, like searching the Chronicle or keeping an eye on Ergben. They might need to convince the NPC to do it. If the NPC is a follower, the task might trigger a move (like Seek Insight or Defy Danger)—in which case, have the player roll for the follower when the PCs return home, to see how it went. If the NPC isn't a follower, then just decide what happens and reveal it when the PCs return.

Make note of any such projects, so that you don't forget them later.

Miscellaneous

Your players will certainly come up with other things to do before leaving. Follow the fiction and your principles. Zoom in and out as you see fit. Tie their actions back to the townsfolk and ask lots of questions. If they trigger a move that impacts their preparations or that would be quickly resolved, have them roll it before they leave. If they trigger a move that takes time to resolve, roll it when they return.

Flashbacks

Sometimes, the PCs get into the field and a player realizes that they should have done something before they left. Let simple things go with “yeah, sure, of course.” For more involved activities, consider playing it out as a flashback. Frame a scene in the past and play it out normally, with moves and rolls and such. When the scene is done, jump back to “now.”

The key thing about flashbacks is that they shouldn't contradict or nullify anything that's happened “on screen” already. For example, if the PCs have already gotten lost trying to follow some tracks, don't let them flashback to borrow a bloodhound.

It's your call whether to allow a flashback, keeping your principles in mind. When in doubt, ask the table at large for their opinion.



While out on the bear hunt, Blodwen realizes that she'd really like to have borrowed one of the horse's moves, "Sniff out danger on the wind." She asks if she could have done that.

Now, Blodwen can calm animals with a touch and they generally love her, but we've established these horses as rather nervous, so this isn't a sure thing. I decide to do a flashback. "Okay, quick... it's back this morning, just before you all left. You're in the stable, the horses are still sleeping. Which one do you wake up, and how?"

"Oh, Fflur, I think. She's the more sensible of the two. I put my hand on her nose and whisper her name, and as she wakes, I offer her a little handful of barley that I secreted away." Fflur munches away and nuzzles Blodwen's hand, asking for more. "I need a favor first, old friend. I'm going out in the Wood today, and you'll be here, safe and sound. I could use your sense of smell. Can you loan that to me?"

That's Persuade, and I think Fflur has reason to resist. Her instinct is "to panic"—she might be the more sensible horse, but she's still a horse. Blodwen rolls +CHA and gets a 7-9. Fflur's like "But, how will I know if predators are coming? Or if the stable burns? Or... or... or predators?" I tell Blodwen that she needs to give Fflur some concrete assurance that she'll be safe without it.

Running the journey

The PCs have made their preparations. They're doing this. "We head out," they say. They're looking at you. Now what?

Break the journey up into **points of interest** and **legs of travel**. The points of interest are the landmarks and the spots where you know something interesting will happen. The legs of travel are the paths between those points.

Then, run the game:

- 1) **Establish the situation:** they're either on a leg of travel, or they've arrived at a point of interest. Describe the environment, provide details, ask questions, portray characters, etc.
- 2) **Make a soft GM move**, especially an exploration move (see page XX). Maybe your move introduces one of the challenges from Chart a Course.
- 3) **Ask "What do you do?"** or otherwise figure out what they're up to.
- 4) **Resolve their actions.** If they trigger a player move, do what it says (and see the expedition moves, starting on page XX). If they roll a 6- or ignore a threat, make a hard GM move. Otherwise, say what happens.
- 5) **Repeat.** Continue to update the situation, make soft GM moves, ask what they do, and resolve their actions until there's nothing interesting left to say or do in the current situation. Then, transition to the next leg of travel or the next point of interest.



Legs of travel

Look at the PC's route and find the next point of interest—the next landmark or spot where you plan to frame a scene. Identify the path that the PCs will take to get there. That's the next leg of travel.

If the leg of travel is trivial—uneventful, through familiar terrain, relatively short—then gloss over it. Briefly describe the weather, the route, and how long it takes, then frame a scene at the next point of interest. "You head down the path into the Great Wood. It's a fine, warm day, and in a few minutes you're standing at the Stream."

Otherwise, play out the leg of travel as a situation, one that's mostly handled through loose play (page XX). Here's how.

Frame the action

Say where they find themselves, and how long they've been going (minutes, hours, days). "Okay, you head out? A half-hour later, you find yourselves past the Old Wall, stepping onto the West Road. An hour later, you're surrounded by the Flats, Stonetop a blip on the horizon."



Describe the environment

If the leg of travel goes through unfamiliar terrain—an environment that the *players* have never seen before, or one that has changed significantly since the PCs last came through—then spend some time describing the environment.

Start with the obvious details: the nature of the terrain, its size and scale, the weather (see page **XX**), and anything that they couldn't help but notice. Provide up to 3 impressions from different senses: things they see, hear, smell, or feel (physically or emotionally) as they travel. The almanac entries for each region include examples.

Keep your descriptions concise. Players will zone out if you give them too much detail, and they'll ask questions when they want or need more.

If the leg goes through familiar terrain—an environment that the players have seen before—then just describe the current weather and maybe remind them what this terrain is like.

Ask questions

Keep players engaged and create a sense of time passing as they travel by **asking lots of questions**.

If the leg goes through unfamiliar terrain, then ask the characters questions about the terrain or what it's like to travel through it. The regional almanac entries each include questions you might ask, and you can always ask questions like:

- ☉ What's the most striking thing that you notice about this terrain?
- ☉ What the best/worst/most unexpected thing about this leg of the journey?
- ☉ What have you heard about this area?
- ☉ When were you here last? How has it changed?
- ☉ How are you dealing with the weather?
- ☉ What are you looking forward to?
- ☉ What are you thinking/worrying about?

If the leg goes through familiar terrain, you should still ask questions, but focus those questions on the weather, or what the PCs are thinking or talking about. Or suggest that they Keep Company (page **XX**), and let them ask questions of each other.

Expeditions

Portray NPCs

If there are any NPCs on the journey, describe what they're up to, what they're talking about, how they're reacting to this leg of travel. Maybe ask players what they have their followers doing, or how they think their followers act.

Add details, answer questions, clarify the situation

Elaborate on the situation as much or as little as your player's interest demands. If they're engaged and enjoying themselves, asking questions and offering more details, then **let things breathe** and spend some time just talking about the leg of travel.

Likewise, if there's confusion or disagreement about what's going on, try to clarify and get everyone on the same page.

Make a soft GM move

Once the situation is well-established, and you feel like it's time to nudge things along, make a soft GM move.

- ⊙ Present one of the challenges you listed when they Charted a Course (page **XX**)
- ⊙ Present an encounter from your prep (page **XX**), or from the setting guide
- ⊙ Have an NPC or follower get into or start some trouble
- ⊙ Stir up conflict between the PCs
- ⊙ **Offer them an opportunity** to do something as they travel, or else to arrive at the next point of interest.

Your exploration moves (page **XX**) will be particularly useful here.

You might stay in loose play and make your move while still zoomed out. "Dark clouds start to loom and you can tell that a storm's brewing. Do you want to press on or seek shelter?"

Or you might zoom in, frame a little scene and make your move there. "A few hours later, your hound starts barking for you to follow him. When you catch up, he's in a clearing with a torn-up carcass, crows pecking at it. A wisent, probably, and pretty fresh. What do you do?"

Resolve their actions

Ask them what they do. If they trigger a player move, resolve it. If they roll a 6-, or if they ignore an established threat, then make a hard GM move. Otherwise, say what happens.

A player's action might prompt you to zoom in and frame a scene (if you haven't already). Great! You're in a scene now.

See page **XX** for expedition moves that the PCs are likely use while traveling.

Repeat

Have you zoomed in and framed a scene?

Cool. Play out the scene—establishing the situation, making soft GM moves, asking "what do you do?" and resolving their actions—until the scene is finished. Then move on to the next scene or situation, or zoom back out to loose play and resolve what's left of this leg of travel.

Is there still more to do in this leg of travel?

Like, another challenge for you to present or another encounter to present? Make a soft GM move to introduce it, then resolve their actions, and see where that leaves you.

When there's nothing left of interest to say or do on this leg of travel, then briefly describe the rest of it—the weather, the terrain, how long it takes—and frame a scene at the next point of interest.

Points of interest

A point of interest is either...

- ... a landmark that has not yet been seen in play (or that has changed since the PC's last visit);
- ... a specific place where you plan to frame a scene and make a GM move; or
- ... the journey's destination.

So, the first time the PCs ford the Stream “on screen,” it’s a point of interest. After that, it’s only a point of interest if something significant has changed or if you plan to do something there like have the PCs encounter the Quiet Twins.

Some points of interest will be obvious and known in advance; others will be surprises. You might prepare the points of a journey between sessions (page **XX**) or decide on the next point when the PCs head out from their current location. You might even decide to add a point of interest on the fly, in the middle of a leg, usually in response to a player’s move.

Frame the action

Establish the PCs arriving at the point of interest. Say when they get there. Zoom in, make it a scene.

Normally, you’ll frame the scene with the PCs at the point of interest, having already arrived. But **if you want to build tension**—because you know there’s danger lurking, or you want them to *feel* like there is—then frame the scene with the location in sight but still at a distance. Then watch the players get all twitchy and suspicious.

Describe the environment

If this place is *unfamiliar to the players*, then describe it. What makes it distinct from the surrounding terrain? What are its obvious, defining features? Provide up to 3 impressions on different senses (see the almanac entries for ideas). Add more details as they become relevant.

Pick impressions and details that matter:

Any scene: light, visibility, space, anything constant and unignorable (wind, rain, heat, cold, sound of a stream, etc.).

Social scenes: the people present, details that reflect their physical or emotional state, their attitudes, the “feel” of the place.

Exploration scenes: footing, line of sight, likely paths, details that tell the place’s story and reflect what has happened here.

Action scenes: dangers of course, but also footing, clearance, distance, obstacles, line of sight, relative positions, momentum, things to knock over/fall from/burn, etc.

If the PCs know this place, because they’ve been here before “off screen” or because they picked the spot themselves, then consider asking *them* to provide some of these details. “Vahid, you’ve been to this pool before. What’s it like?”

If this place is familiar to the players, then just remind them what it’s like and point out anything that’s changed since the last time they visited it in play.

Expeditions

Ask questions

If this is the first time the players visit a known landmark in play (like the Stream or the Crossroads), ask the characters questions about the place. The almanac entries for each locale include questions you might ask, and you can always ask questions like:

- ⊗ What's the most striking thing that you notice about this place?
- ⊗ What here tells you that this is a place where/of/that ___?
- ⊗ What have you heard about this place?
- ⊗ When were you here last? How has it changed?
- ⊗ How does this place make you feel?
- ⊗ What are you thinking/worrying about?

Build on the answers they give you, reincorporating them into the fiction and asking follow-up questions as they occur to you. Take notes, and call back to these details later in play.

Portray NPCs

If there are any NPCs on the journey, ask yourself how they'd react to this place. Drop this into your descriptions to remind the players (and yourself) that they're here. Maybe get ready to make a soft GM move with (or against) an NPC.

Add details, answer questions, clarify the scene

Flesh out the scene as much as you need to, in response to player questions or PC actions. Draw a quick map or picture if you think it will help. Figure out who's where and doing what. If there's confusion or disagreement about what's going on, try to get everyone on the same page.

Make a soft GM move

If you zoomed in on this place solely because it's a landmark that hasn't been seen on screen before, and you don't really have anything else to do here, then just **offer them an opportunity**. "Okay, does anyone want to have a conversation in-character? Or do something else here? Or do you move on?"

Otherwise, make a soft GM move. Say something that provokes the PCs to act and/or that increases tension. Your exploration moves (next page) will be particularly useful here.

Resolve their actions, repeat

Play out the scene. Ask them what they do. Resolve their actions. Establish how the scene and the situation has changed. Repeat, moving the spotlight around between PCs. **Play to find out what happens.**

If this point of interest is their destination, or if things have taken a dramatic turn, then this scene might roll into another scene, and another. Great! The journey is over, at least for now, and they're likely exploring a site (page **XX**) or another steading (page **XX**).

When the party decides to move on,

figure out what their next point of interest is, what the next leg of travel is to get there, and frame the action on that leg of travel. If they decide to go home, see page **XX**.

Exploration moves

Add these to your arsenal of GM moves once the players leave town and head into the wider world. These same moves get used when exploring sites (see page **XX**), but here, we'll discuss how to use them as part of a journey.

Your exploration moves are:

- Provide a choice of paths
- Hint at more than meets the eye
- Offer riches at a price
- Present a discovery
- Point to a looming danger
- Introduce a danger, person, or faction
- Bar the way

Provide a choice of paths

Present the proverbial fork in the road and ask them which way they go. There might be other paths, and they might do something different, but you're presenting the obvious options and prompting them to choose.

Try to give them some indication of how the options are different. Otherwise, their choice isn't meaningful.

The available paths don't have to be literal paths, or they don't both have to be. For example, the choice could be between stopping and exploring this ruin, or pressing on towards their destination.

As a hard move, provide a choice between paths that they don't want to take.

"The cave is maybe 30 or 40 paces off to your right, no sign of movement around it. But, Blodwen, you spot tracks in the snow. Big ones, leading from the cave and off to your left. What do you do?"

"Okay, the sledges are loaded. Are you going to head back the way you came? The crinwin will almost certainly notice you if you do. Or you could cut deeper into the Woods and try to circle around them, but that'll take longer. What do you do?"

"As hard as you push yourselves, by the time the sun's almost set, you're still a good half-hour away from town, maybe more. Do you press on, traveling in the dark? Or you do start looking for some place to spend the night out here?"

Expeditions

Hint at more than meets the eye

Drop a hint that there's something interesting here, a discovery to be discovered or a lie to be uncovered. This move often spurs the players to Seek Insight or Know Things or otherwise look closer.

To make this move, point out something out of place or something fraught with meaning, but don't say what it means. Be a little coy about it. It's a hint, not an announcement.

"Blodwen, while Rhianna and her crew are butchering the bear, you get this... feeling. Like, sort of a chill, and not just from the cold. You think you're being watched. What do you do?"

"Vahid, as you watch the crinwin flee, you realize that they all headed for this great big redwood pine, maybe fifty paces away. Just the sort of tree where they'd nest. Everyone else is catching their breath and wiping off crinwin blood. What do you do?"

Offer riches at a price

Show them something valuable, but costly or difficult to get. Then sit back and see if they think it's worth it.

Consider "riches" to be anything the PCs would consider valuable. That could be actual riches, or just some sort of supply or resource they desperately need. And consider "price" to be any sort of cost: time or safety, effort or attention or retribution.

As a hard move, offer something that you know one of the PCs (or NPCs) on the journey *really* wants, but in a way that would derail or jeopardize the overall expedition. Bonus points if the opportunity is fleeting, increasing the pressure to go after it.

"Rhianna, while they're butchering the bear by the stream, Lowri calls you over and points out a huge set of hoof prints. 'Ceirwmarw, I'm sure of it. Fresh, too.' His eyes gaze off deeper into the Wood. 'It'd be a feat to sing of, that's for sure. Not to mention a whole lotta meat.' What do you do?"

"You know, if that is a crinwin nest—and it sure looks like one—there's probably all sorts of stolen stuff up there. Like, all the things they've swiped from people this past year. Maybe even your grandmother's ring, Caradoc. What do you do?"

Present a discovery

Discoveries are interesting things that the PCs find but that aren't inherently or immediately dangerous. They might be useful or valuable, or just something mysterious that's worth investigating.

When you make this move, you just put the discovery in front of them. Describe it, tell them what they see/hear/smell/feel, what (if anything) it does. Make it clear that this is something of note. What they do next is up to them.

"Blodwen, while you and Vabid wait for the others, the wind picks up and starts tossing puffs of snow about. But then you realize that, no, those puffs are a little too intentional, and you hear—no, more like sense—a laughter in the wind. There's a wind spirit flitting about. What do you do?"

"Yeah, Vabid, now that you're closer, and looking up at it, you can see that it's definitely a nest. A papery thing, like a wasp nest, but way, way bigger. This must be what the crinwin live in. What do you do?"

Point to a looming danger

This is the claw-print in the mud, the wolves howling in the distance. This is the piles of sticks, strangely neat and tidy, sure sign that a hagr dwells nearby.

Use this move to foreshadow future dangers, to make the PCs nervous and to prompt them to investigate or take precautions. Or flee. They could also flee.

Here's a good twist on this move: instead of telling them what they find, ask them what they find that tells them __ is afoot.

You can also ask a question that gets them thinking about the danger without revealing any specific sign of it. Like, "Caradoc, what sort of experience do you have with feathered drakes?" Or, "Vahid, what have heard about the nosgolau, the night-lights that are said to haunt the Flats and lure travelers off the road?"

"Rhianna, you've all been quietly trudging for a couple hours through the snow when the hair on the back of neck stands on end. What do you see or hear that tells you that you've entered crinwin territory?"

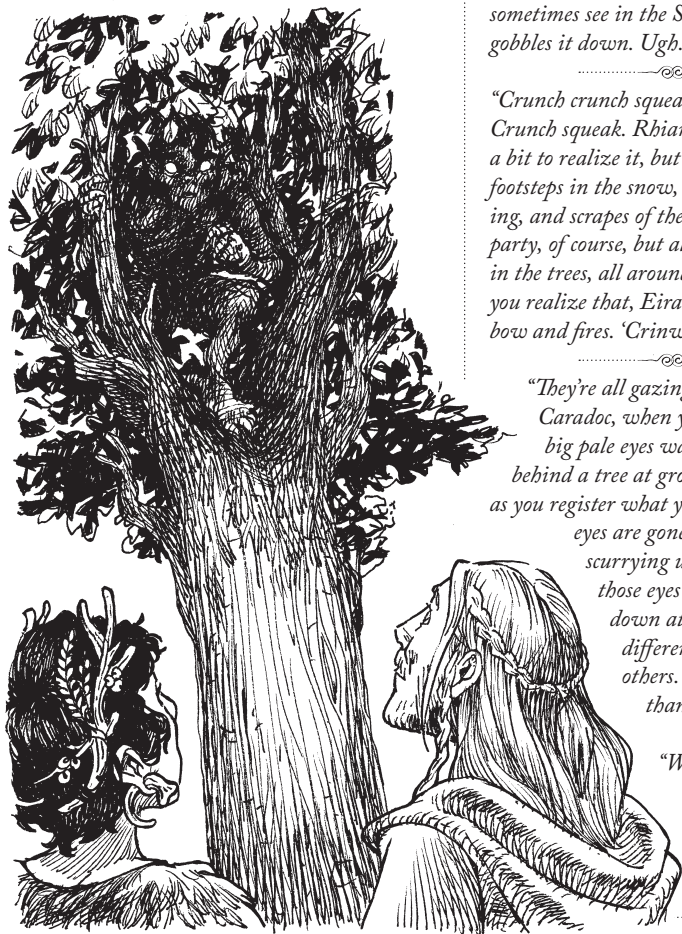
"Blodwen, as you sniff the air, you catch the unmistakable scent of a predator, one of the bears, you're sure of it. And not coming from the cave... it's coming from the east, towards the Stream. What do you do?"

Expeditions

Introduce a danger, person, or faction

With this move, you're putting a danger on screen. You're not pointing to it, it's not looming, it's *here*, what do you do?

Alternately, you're introducing an NPC and giving the PCs a chance to interact with them. Or, you're revealing that there's a subset of creatures or people that they didn't know about before: different strains of crinwin, a cult within the Hillfolk, rivalries and allegiances among the fae, etc.



As a hard move, you'll often introduce a danger by jumping straight into a fight or action scene. A *stealthy* foe or a hidden hazard might even attack and deal damage before the PCs can react!

"Okay, so you all creep towards the Stream. You hear the rush of water, and then you see it. It's huge, like a horse but stouter, pacing back and forth at an opening in the ice. Its snout darts into the water and pops up with one of those silvery, scaly slug-things that you sometimes see in the Stream, and it just gobbles it down. Ugh. What do you do?"

"Crunch crunch squeak. Huff huff huff. Crunch squeak. Rhianna, it takes you a bit to realize it, but you're hearing footsteps in the snow, and heavy breathing, and scrapes of the sledges... from the party, of course, but also coming from up in the trees, all around you. And just as you realize that, Eira pulls back on her bow and fires. 'Crinwin!' she yells!"

"They're all gazing up at that nest, Caradoc, when you notice a pair of big pale eyes watching you from behind a tree at ground level. As soon as you register what you're seeing, the eyes are gone, and there's a scurrying up the tree. Then those eyes poke out, looking down at you. It seems... different... than the others. Curious, rather than angry."

"What do you do?"



Bar the way

They encounter an obstacle, or hit a dead end, or discover they lack something needed to move ahead. They've got to find a way through, or over, or to backtrack and find a way around.

Describe what's barring the way forward, and maybe give an option or two for what they could do instead.

"It's just not going to happen, Caradoc. You can barely scale the bluff yourself, and don't see any way to drag those sledges up here laden with bear meat. And it's not like there's anything up on the Flats for you to tie a rope around, either."

"You drag the sledges northeast but, shortly past the Stream, the drifts get much deeper. It'd be grueling to wade through and there's no way you'd get home by dark. Looks like the only path left is back through crinwin territory. What do you do?"

Use other moves, too!

Just to be clear: you can and should use your standard GM moves while the PCs are on a journey. **Ask provocative questions** ("what's your crew doing to get on your nerves?"), **demonstrate downsides** ("you're falling behind under all that gear"), **separate them** ("down the hill you go"), **use up their resources** ("expend 3 uses of supplies each, or 3 total if you use a mess kit"), **tell them the consequences/requirements** ("you need fire to use a mess kit, but a fire will draw attention from the crinwin"), and so forth.

Expeditions

Resolving Chart a Course

When the PCs Charted a Course, you gave them a list of requirements and challenges (see page XX).

Requirements

Hopefully, they addressed the requirements (like “You’ll need to bring ___” or “You need a knowledgeable guide”) before they left. If they didn’t, **tell them the consequences** of not being prepared. If they persist, either **bar the way** or add some extra challenges to your list.

Once they’re in the field, make soft GM moves that threaten the things they need, and/or to **show their downsides**. Put the guide in danger. Describe how loud the horse and cart are or how heavy the firewood is.

When it’s time to make a hard GM move, consider targeting these same resources. What do they do when guide is injured, or the horse runs off in a panic?

If they no longer have what they need for the journey, make them feel it. **Show the downsides** or **tell them the consequences** or just **bar the way**, and see how they cope.

Presenting challenges

Once the PCs head out on the journey, you need to present the challenges that you warned them about, plus any others that they couldn’t see have seen coming. That includes both surprises that you’ve prepped in advance, or things that arise naturally from the fiction or the dice.

As you resolve a leg of travel (page XX), ask yourself whether this is a good place to introduce a challenge. Likewise, as you pick points of interest (page XX), pick spots where you can introduce a challenge. You can also introduce a challenge after you’ve framed a scene for any reason, often in response to a PC’s move.

Usually: introduce a challenge by making a soft GM move. Ask the PCs what they do and resolve their actions. Repeat as needed. The PCs might overcome the challenge quickly and easily or things might snowball into a steaming mess. Follow the core loop and **play to find out what happens**. When the situation is resolved, move on to the next one.

If you introduce a challenge in response to a 6- on PC move, then feel free to drop them right into the thick of it. If someone gets a 6- to Forage (page XX) and one of the challenges is “you risk getting lost,” then you can just have them get lost as your hard move. You don’t have to *threaten* them with getting lost, first. They’re lost!

Present each challenge only once. After the party deals with it, then tick that challenge off your list. Present a different challenge, or the next point of interest, or the next leg of travel, or have them arrive at their destination.

With that said: a challenge that they’ve addressed could come back to haunt them if they make poor decisions or if the dice don’t go their way. Yeah, they might have Struggled as One to handle the treacherous mire of Ferrier’s Fen, but they’re still in the fen! A 6- on a future roll could still send someone plunging into the water, and running off blindly into the mists is still a good way to get drowned.

The PCs are en route to Three-Coven Lake from Marshedge. Their current leg of travel has them following the Sruth into the Steplands. This seems like a good time to add a challenge: “the terrain is treacherous.”

*I keep things zoomed out and **tell them the consequences**. “The rain has made the soil loose and muddy. If you stick to the river, you’ll be Struggling as One, risking a fall or even a mudslide. What do you do?”*

Rhianna uses her Read the Land move, asking for the best way through. I improvise, saying that the southern slopes look a bit rockier and more stable. She leads them that way and gets advantage on her Struggle as One roll (see page XX). Good thing, too, because Caradoc and Vahid both roll a 6–, getting caught in a mudslide. Rhianna uses her 10+ result to rescue Vahid (yanking him back from the scarp), but Caradoc is in trouble and starts to get swept away down the slope!

We zoom in and play out the scene. Caradoc barely manages to save himself, taking some damage, getting very muddy, and losing all his supplies in the process. They take a brief rest and press on.

*For their next point of interest, I pick a spot where I can introduce another challenge: a valley where three tributaries of the Sruth come together, and they risk picking the wrong one and getting lost. I frame a scene with them overlooking the valley, describe the environment, and **introduce the danger**. “It’s not clear from here which one leads to Three-Coven Lake. Pick wrong and you’ll end up lost or at least wasting lots of time. What do you do?” Vahid Spouts Lore (recalling his previous wanderings in these parts) and gets an 11. I reveal that they want the southern fork. Huzzah!*

*Their next point of interest will be wherever they Make Camp, and this leg is just more rugged, muddy hills as they follow the tributary. They’ve already dealt with the treacherous terrain, but I also said that the way will be grueling. So, I **present a choice of paths**. “Rhianna, you’re humping up the twentieth slope today, and it’s just a wet slog. You’ve got a few hours of light left. Do you want press on and Struggle as One with CON? Or look for a place to camp, maybe hunt a bit?” They opt to stop and Forage (see page XX), but get a 6–. This area is perilous, so I aggressively introduce a danger. A Hillfolk ambush it is!*

“The way is perilous, filled with dangers”

This isn’t a specific challenge, it’s more of an ongoing threat. Save it for truly dangerous legs of travel: Ferrier’s Fen, the Steplands near the lakes, the Labyrinth, etc.

On each leg of perilous travel, and each time they Make Camp (page XX) in a perilous area, **point to a looming danger** or **introduce a danger** that’s already been established. Then see how they respond.

If you like, **have them roll the Die of Fate**.

1d6 DANGER

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 1 | A danger springs on them, unavoidable |
| 2-3 | Introduce a danger, right in front of them |
| 4-5 | Point to a looming danger |
| 6 | Point to a looming danger, but also present a discovery |

Also, feel free to spring dangers on them any time that they roll a 6– (on any move), or any time a move draws attention or a generates a complication.

Expeditions



Weather

The weather is an important part of any journey. It colors the whole trip and can be a challenge all by itself.

You decide when it rains and when the sun shines, based on your agenda and principles but also on your sense of theme and story. Include the weather when you describe the environment (“It’s a chilly morning, a thin fog blanketing the land”) and invoke the weather with your GM moves. **Announce trouble** by describing how the wind picks up and the canopy sways and the sky goes dark. **Bar the way** with a blizzard. **Separate them** in the fog.

If you want, let the Die of Fate guide your choices. For example, you could ask the players what sort of weather they hope for, then have them roll a d6 to see how well fate complies. If they’re sneaking into a mercenary camp in winter, they might hope for winds and snow to hide their approach. On a 1 or 2, nope, it’s a clear, still night with a bright moon, so cold that every step squeaks. On a 3 or 4, there’s a driving wind *or* a gentle snow. On a 5 or 6, yeah, just what they wanted.

Another way to use the Die of Fate is with preset results, based on the season. Here are some general tables that do just that. Use these as-is, or make your own for specific locales and specific seasons, informed by the most recent Seasons Change move (see page [XX](#)).



Weather tables

LATE WINTER/EARLY SPRING

1d6	WEATHER
1	Snow/sleet/hail, an early thunderstorm or day of cold, soaking rains
2-3	Cold and windy, maybe some showers
4	Clouds on the horizon and steady wind; roll twice tomorrow and take the lower roll
5-6	A fine, sunny spring day; some clouds, some gusting winds

SUMMER

1d6	WEATHER
1	A heavy storm; high winds, hail, thunder, lightning, tornadoes
2	Blazing heat, still air, not a cloud in sight
3	Hot and humid, with brief, drenching thunder storms
4-5	Hot, muggy, some wind
6	Warm, sunny, breezy, perfect

AUTUMN

1d6	WEATHER
1	Cold, drenching rain and/or sleet all day
2	Cold, windy, an early snowfall
3	Chilly, windy, maybe some quick rain showers
4-6	Crisp, breezy

SPRING/EARLY SUMMER

1d6	WEATHER
1	A heavy storm; high winds, hail, thunder, lightning
2	A day of steady, chilly rain
3-4	Warm and windy, maybe some brief showers
5-6	Warm, sunny, pleasant

LATE SUMMER/EARLY AUTUMN

1d6	WEATHER
1	One last powerful thunderstorm or a day of cold, soaking rain
2	Windy with a few rain showers
3	Warm, clouds on the horizon, a steady wind (roll twice tomorrow and take the lower roll)
4-5	Hot and dry during the day; cooler and windy at night
6	Warm, sunny, breezy, perfect

WINTER

1d6	WEATHER
1	Blizzard: wind, snow, all of it
2	Intense cold and wind
3	Very cold, very clear, very still
4	Cold and snowy, or cold and windy
5	Some snow, but mostly just dreary
6	Warm (for winter) and sunny

Expeditions

PC moves

These moves become relevant while the PCs are on an expedition.

HAVE WHAT YOU NEED

When you *decide that you had something all along*, transfer a mark (or marks) from your “undefined” inventory to a specific item or a slot. If you mark a slot, fill it with a common mundane item or something from your personal possessions.

Alternately, you can expend a use of supplies to mark an additional small item/slot (□).

Whatever you produce, it must be something you could have had all along. The GM or any player can veto unreasonable items.

This move lets the players convert undefined inventory into specific items. It means that when they Outfit, they don't have to decide on everything that they've brought with them; they determine how much they're carrying and can define their inventory in the field.

Once they use this move to produce an item, that item is now in their inventory. They can drop it, use it up, break it, give it to someone else, etc.

This move can only produce items the character already owns or common, mundane items (like those on the Inventory insert or things that could be easily acquired in an iron-age home or farm). You can also let them retroactively try to Trade & Barter for special items via a flashback.

Loot, load, and inventory

If a PC or follower acquires something in the field (like loot) and wants to bring it along, they have to add it to their inventory.

Small items (things that could fit in a pocket, purse, or boot with room to spare) don't count against a character's load. The player can just add it to the **Small items** section of their Inventory sheet. There's no hard limit on how many small items they can carry, but you can call shenanigans if you think they're being unreasonable.

Items with a ◇ or ◇◇ count towards a character's load. Remember: 3 ♡ or less is a light load, 4-6 ♡ is normal, and 7-9 ♡ is a heavy load. They can drop (or give away) items from their inventory to make space, or they can discard (or give away) undefined ♡.

If they want to carry 10 ♡ or more, or something very heavy/awkward (like an unconscious ally or a loaded sledge), then not only will they be slow and noisy, but they'll also risk exhaustion, accident, and/or injury.

Tell them the consequences, then continue to make it a significant part of the fiction and your moves.

Ask questions about the stuff they produce. “What kind of food did you bring?” “Who did you get that from?” “What made you think to bring that?” You're not (usually) trying to challenge their decisions; these questions provide texture and help you **portray a rich and fantastic world**.

They creep up towards the cave entrance, and peer in. "It's really dark in there," I say. "Are you going in blind, or what?"

*Caradoc says, "I'll use my lantern!" It's not a standard thing on the Inventory sheet, but it is one of his special possessions (a gift from Sawyl), so he can produce it with this move. He moves a ♡ from "undefined" to the slot with "◇ Sawyl's lantern," then says he'll light it. "You have a tinderbox?" He doesn't, but it's an option in the **Small Items** section of his Inventory sheet. He moves a mark from his undefined small items to the tinderbox, uses the tinderbox to light the lantern, and hands it over the Blodwen, so that he can wield his shield and spear. (Technically, she should now add it to her sheet and maybe give Caradoc one of her Undefined ♡, but we all expect this to be temporary so we just ignore it for now.)*

"Okay," I say, as they leave for Marshedge. "The first two days pass without incident. You find yourselves making camp, just before dark, at the wayside near Titan Bones. Mark off two uses of supplies each, or 4 total if someone has a mess kit."

They look at each other, and realize that no one has supplies in their Inventory, or a mess kit. "Well, you can Have What You Need for supplies and a mess kit. One diamond of supplies gives you 4 uses, and the mess kit is one diamond itself."

"Andras has the mess kit," says Rhianna. "He insisted on coming, he can do the cooking." She moves one his undefined ♡ to a slot on the follower sheet, and writes in "mess kit."

"Okay. I've got the supplies," says Caradoc. He erases an undefined ♡. He's about to mark one by "Supplies," but realizes that he's going to expend all 4 uses, so he doesn't bother. "Hey... it says here that a mess kit requires fire and water. Does that mean we need to provide firewood, too?"

"Not necessarily," says Vahid. "We established that merchants usually stock the waysides with wood and dried dung for fires. Sort of a leave-a-penny, take-a-penny thing. And the waysides all have wells." I agree... they've got fire and water covered.

"Hmm," says Rhianna. "Two days used up 4 supplies. We've got another eight days ahead of us... so that's 16 more uses of supplies. Or four more diamonds." She, Blodwen, Vahid, and Andras each convert one of their undefined ♡ into supplies.

"What sort of food are you carrying, mostly?" I ask.

"Well," says Rhianna, "It'd have to be something lightweight, enough to fill bellies, but only when cooked. Hmm. Looks like we're eating oatmeal, kids."

The "veto" clause in the move is there to maintain plausibility. It means that you can say "no" when a player decides they've been wearing a bunch of mummer's bells while they've been sneaking through a silent ruin. It also means you can **reveal an unwelcome truth** when appropriate, and

say things like "Wait, a clay pot? Didn't you tumble down a rocky slope earlier? I don't think anything fragile like that would have survived."

Expeditions

RECOVER

When you *take time to catch your breath and tend to what ails you*, expend 1 use of supplies and regain HP equal to 4+Prosperity. You can't gain this benefit again until you take more damage.

When you *tend to a debility or a problematic wound*, say how. The GM will either say that it's taken care of or tell you what else is required to do so.

Characters will often need to Recover while on an expedition. This move is described in detail in the Harm & Healing chapter (page XX).

STRUGGLE AS ONE

When you *Defy Danger as a group*, establish the party's approach and each roll +STAT (per Defy Danger): **on a 6-**, you find yourself in a spot, the GM will describe it or ask you to; **on a 7-9**, you pull your weight; **on a 10+**, you do well enough to get someone else out of a spot, if you can tell us how.

If you roll a 6- but someone saves you, don't mark XP.

This move triggers when the whole party works together in the face of the same danger(s), usually over a period of time and when you don't want to dwell on the details. If you're about to have everyone Defy Danger, you should probably use this move instead. It's intentionally more forgiving than everyone Defying Danger, and it moves the action along more quickly.

With that said: they aren't Struggling as One if one PC is essentially responsible for everyone else's fate. If they risk getting lost and the Ranger is navigating, then the Ranger is Defying Danger (maybe with someone providing Aid). They'd only be Struggling as One if they faced some additional danger or challenge, against which they all contended and contributed.

When you call for them to Struggle as One, clarify the danger and the stakes. Use the same trick you use with Defy Danger: "Sounds like you're Struggling as One, and the danger is getting stuck or exhausted by the muck and mire."

It's possible—likely, even—that the PCs will strive against multiple dangers. If the dangers are sequential (like scaling the cliff and then rushing to get back to camp before the storm hits), then resolve it as two separate moves. But if they're dealing with multiple dangers at once (like trying to reach the hilltop before nightfall while also avoiding hunting drakes), then it's a single set of rolls.

"Establish the party's approach" means "figure out how they're going about this." What's the plan? Who's going first? Are they using, say, a rope? Who's on lookout? And so forth. From there, figure out which stat(s) make the most sense. Use the same guidelines you would for Defy Danger. Everyone might roll the same stat, or (if they break up the jobs), they might each roll something different.

Those participating in the struggle can't Aid each other—they're already involved! In order to Aid, a PC or follower must be somehow unaffected by the struggle (like a Ranger's bird flying ahead to scout as the party trudges through the fen).

Everyone rolls at once and figures out what they got. Encourage them to keep their results quiet for the moment.

Ask who got a 6-. **Put them in a spot**, following your principles and exploiting your prep. (If someone received Aid, then put the helper in the spot with them, or instead of them.)

Once you've described the spot, ask if anyone got a 10+. Ask them to describe how they get the character(s) out of their spot. If they come up with something plausible, then they do it—no more rolls required.

If multiple characters get a 6-, you've got a few choices:

Put them in the same spot, or close enough. "Caradoc, Vahid, you're trudging along, and... the hill isn't really *moving*, is it? But then you realize, yeah, it is, it's a mudslide! The path you're on starts to give way." In this case, a single 10+ might save everyone, depending on the fiction and what that player comes up with.

Put them in different spots at the same time. "Blodwen, as twilight falls, you find yourself falling behind, breathing hard, losing sight of the others. Meanwhile, Rhianna, you realize that you've lost track of Eira in the grass. Like, oh crap, where is she?" In this case, each 10+ will save only one of them.

Pick one and put them in a spot, ignoring the other 6- results for now. Resolve that spot. Then, **say how time has passed and put the next character in a different spot.** This is a great technique to demonstrate a really long and arduous trek, or one with multiple dangers. In this case, each 10+ can be used only once.

If anyone finds themselves in a spot and there isn't a 10+ to save them (or the player who rolled 10+ can't come up with something plausible, or chooses not to), then zoom in and play out the scene from there. Ask the affected character what they do. Or, tell someone else what they see and ask *them* what they do. Maybe they just Defy Danger and roll a 10+ and it's all good. Maybe it snowballs into an absolute disaster. Play to find out.

If the scene resolves and they've gotten themselves out of the spot, don't make them Struggle as One again against the same challenge. Just skip ahead to the end of the struggle. But if, in the process of resolving any 6- results, the situation changes such that they face a new or different danger, then it's okay to have them Struggle as One again.

Regardless of the results, this move is a great time to ask questions. "Blodwen, have you ever been up this high before? How does the view make you feel?" "Vahid, as the path slipped out under your feet and you started to fall, what went through your mind?" "Rhianna, after you've hauled Caradoc back up on the path, huffing and puffing... what do you say to him?"

Expeditions

One of Rhianna's crew just came back with a rusty spade and Rhianna's sure of it—this is crinwin territory. They hope to sneak through and avoid a fight, kill the bears, then find a way up the bluffs and head home via the Flats.

"So, you're being sneaky?" I ask. "Sounds like you're Struggling as One, and the danger is that the crinwin notice you. What does this look like? Are you all together, or spread out, or what?"

"We go single-file, weapons out," says Rhianna. "Just a couple paces between us. Lowri scouts ahead, he's got the sharpest eyes. I'll go next, and you three follow me. Step where I step. The rest of my crew will bring up the rear. I'll look for the firmest ground, least likely to make noise. There's no point in hiding... we'll just have to move quietly and hope that no one's watching."

Okay! I tell Rhianna she can roll +INT or +WIS, since she's looking for the firmest and quietest path, but everyone else will be rolling +DEX to follow her steps. Rhianna's crew rolls +1 (they're stealthy), but Andras rolls +0 because none of his tags apply. The dice hit the table.

"Okay, anyone get a 6 or less?" Vahid did. "Okay, cool. Don't mark XP just yet. Let's see... oh, yeah. All that weird gear you carry, because of Magpie? It's not stowed right for this stealthy stuff. You're snagged on something and if you try to move, it's going to fall and make a lot of noise. What do you think it is?"

"Marbles," says Vahid. "I've got a big pouch of them." He moves an undefined mark on his Inventory sheet to a slot and writes in "pouch of marbles."

"Why do you... no, never mind. That pouch is now snagged on a branch, suspended like this, and one of the marbles fell out, hit a rock. CLINK! Everyone's stopped, holding their breath. If you shift even a little, it'll spill open and make a ton of noise. Anyone got a 10+, able to help him out?"

Rhianna does. "Any sign of crinwin? Like, did they hear that clink?"

"Yeah," I say. "It's painfully quiet. You're all stock still, not even breathing, and you then you hear it. 'Clink! Clink! Clink clink CLINK!' in the distance. Crinwin, mimicking the sound. A way off, but maybe getting closer? What do you do?"

"I motion for everyone to be still, then I take that rusty spade we found and I hurl it behind us, north and east. I'm hoping it'll hit a tree and draw their attention while we skedaddle. Yeah?"

"Smart. Sounds like you're Defying Danger with INT?"

"I got a 10+ on my Struggle Together. Doesn't that mean I can just do it?"

"Oh, right, sorry. Yeah, it's like you say... you throw the spade, hurl it maybe 30, 40 paces away. It ricochets off a tree, PING. And then the crinwin start going 'PING! PING!' and you can tell they're moving in that direction. What do you do?"

"I slip back to Vahid, unsnag his pouch, give him a dirty look, and we get out of here."

"Cool! Okay, off you go. And, Blodwen, what was racing through you mind during all of that?"

The PCs have put fire to the crinwin nest and started heading back toward Stonetop. I tell them the requirements. "Between the fight, and the nest, and the bears... it's getting late. If you want to get home before dark, you're going to have to Struggle as One. The danger is that you exhaust yourselves, or take too long, or run into something else out here. How do you do this?"

"Let's put two people on each sledge and haul ass. Vahid, Caradoc, and I will each take one, pared up with one of my crew. Blodwen, you take point with Eira and Lowri, keep us going the right direction and watch for trouble. Yeah?"

Everyone agrees. "Blodwen, you'll be rolling WIS. Everyone else, I think either STR or CON, your choice. Vahid, you've got a heavy load, so roll with disadvantage. Rhianna, your crew isn't hardy or athletic or the like, right? So I think they're +0?"

"Really? Lowri and Eira are navigating and watching for trouble. And they're all Woods-wise." That works for me, so, sure, they roll +1.

Everyone rolls. Vahid and Caradoc both get a 6-. I could put Vahid and Caradoc in a spot together, but I feel like spreading it out.

"Vahid, you're hauling, hauling, hauling, right? Your nose is running, your eyes are watering, your lungs are burning. When was the last time you worked this hard for this long?"

"Oh, I pull my weight around the village," he says. "It's not a matter of hard work, it's the damn cold that's doing it to me. My lungs are just raw."

"Sure, cool. Anyhow, you start stumbling. You get up each time, but you and Andras are falling behind. Does anyone have a 10+ and a way to help them out?"

Rhianna does. "I curse a little, then tell Lowri to take over for Vahid. And I have Eira to take over for me. We'll rotate through, every ten minutes or so, two people get a breather."

That takes care of Vahid, but Caradoc still has a 6-. "Okay, you rotate like, three times, pacing yourselves but making progress. Then, Caradoc, there's a lurch on your sledge. And a grinding sound. Something tears. Vahid, you see that they've hit a log, buried in the snow. A branch snagged the sledge, and the whole thing is stuck. Anyone else got a 10+?" They all look around, but no one does. Blodwen and Rhianna's crew both got 7-9s. "Okay, Caradoc, mark XP. What do you all do?"

And we play out the scene from there.



Expeditions

KEEP COMPANY

When you *spend a stretch of time together*, ask the others if they want to Keep Company. If they do, take turns asking a PC or NPC one of the following.

- What do you do that's annoying/ endearing?
- What do I do that you find annoying/ endearing?
- Who or what seems to be on your mind?
- What do we find ourselves talking about?
- How do you/we pass the time?
- What new thing do you reveal about yourself?

This move helps to develop characters, build camaraderie, reveal intraparty tensions, and so forth. Good, juicy stuff.

Watch for opportunities to invoke this move, but don't overdo it. You or any player can decline, usually because you've Kept Company recently or there's something more interesting that you or they want to get to. Check with the group and see if they want to Keep Company when...

- ... they Make Camp;
- ... there's a stretch of uneventful travel;
- ... they Struggle as One, and everyone gets a 7+;
- ... some of the party split off to go do something, and you jump back to the others who are waiting around;
- ... two or more characters share a watch; or...
- ... the party spends time doing some boring task (like Foraging or chopping timber up in the foothills).

It's particularly good to Keep Company on the way *home* from an adventure, as it gives everyone a chance to reflect on how the recent events have affected them.

Once you've decided to Keep Company, prompt the players to start asking questions. Pick someone to go first (it can be you if you want). Have them pick a question, a character to ask about, and go. They can ask about other PCs or NPCs who are present; you, of course, should ask about PCs.

Just to be clear: the characters aren't sitting around, actually asking each other these questions. You—the real-life players and GM—are asking each other questions about each others' characters.

If there's a question or an answer that piques your interest or that seems a bit vague, ask follow-up questions (and encourage the other players to do the same). "Oh, you're thinking about Morwena? How can we tell? Blodwen, what do you do when you see that?"

Sometimes these questions will lead to little scenes. That's great! Players might even trigger moves (like Persuade or Seek Insight) before the next player asks their question. All good.

Vahid, Caradoc, Blodwen, and Rhianna make camp near Titan Bones. They've got Andras with them, but left the rest of Rhianna's crew behind. After handling the logistics, I propose that we Keep Company and everyone agrees. "Okay, who wants to ask the first question?"

Rhianna goes first. "Andras, what do you do that's endearing?" Andras is a follower, so it's my job to answer. "I think, mostly, he's just being competent and helpful and doesn't need to be told to do anything. He's come a long way since you first took him under your wing. And maybe, too, the way he's mooning over Blodwen. It's pretty cute."

That makes me wonder how Blodwen will react, so I take my turn. "Blodwen, what is Andras doing that you find annoying or endearing?" (Notice how I didn't choose one or the other; I'm genuinely curious how she feels about him.) She thinks about it a bit and says that she keeps catching him looking at her, then pretending he isn't. He's been doing it most of the trip. "Is that annoying?" I ask, "Or endearing?"

"Annoying," she says. "Even though I'm doing the same thing to Caradoc." Oh? Oh!

I ask Blodwen to go next. "Caradoc, who or what do you seem to be thinking about?" As if she needs to ask. "Morwena," he says. "Definitely Morwena." I ask how we can tell and he's like "Oh, I'm just sitting here moping, the cloak she made for me pulled tight. I'm kind of fingering the hem and staring off into space." He gives a longing sigh.

I ask Blodwen how she reacts. She goes over and gives him a bowl of porridge. "Want to talk about it?" she asks.

"No," he sighs. But then he blurts out "I mean, what am I supposed to do? Just stay home and do nothing when there's danger afoot? Let other people take care of it? Like, Rhianna? Or, like, like you? Gods, I thought women wanted someone brave and tough and all that. But no, not Morwena. She just wants me to stay home and dig in the dirt."

"Ain't nothing wrong with staying home and tilling the earth," Rhianna says under her breath. (I shoot her player a little grin.)

The scene plays out, with Andras looking a bit sullen. Rhianna uses Take the Measure to ask if she can trust him to keep things professional, and I'm like "For now, yeah."

Vahid hasn't asked a question, so he goes. "I sit down next to Rhianna and offer her a smoke. What new thing do you reveal about yourself? I'm interested in that comment, about staying home and tilling the earth."

Rhianna's always cagey about her past, and I half-expect her to cop out and say something like "Nothing. I tell everyone to shut up and get some sleep." But out here, without most of her crew around, she opens up a bit. "I was betrothed, once," she says. "To a boy named... Urien. He was a farmer's son. Worthless with a spear, but gentle and good with animals. You'd have liked him, Blodwen." Vahid asks what happened and she sighs and shakes her head. "Got sick. Caught the fever in late autumn, was dead by winter." She gives a little smile. "Life sucks, then you die. Grab onto the ones you got." And then she's like, "I'm looking straight at Caradoc when I say this."

"What?" he says, acting like he doesn't get it.

Expeditions

MAKE CAMP

When you *settle in to rest in an unsafe area*, answer the GM's questions about your campsite. Each member of the party must consume 1 use of supplies or provisions; if you use a ◇ mess kit (*requires fire & water*), then 1 use can provide for up to four people.

If you *eat and drink your fill*, and *get at least a few hours of sleep*, pick 1.

- ⊙ Regain HP equal to ½ your max
- ⊙ Clear a debility

If *your rest was particularly peaceful, comfortable, or enjoyable*, you also gain advantage on your next roll.

Make Camp happens when the party **settles in** to rest in **an unsafe area**. There's a lot of judgement calls to be made. If you're handwaving a few days of travel on the Maker's roads, the move doesn't trigger every night. You can just **use up their resources** ("okay, the next three days consume 6 uses of supplies...") and frame the next scene ("...and towards the end of your fourth day of travel, you round the bend and Gordin's Delve looms above") without ever bothering with Make Camp.

But! If there's danger afoot, or the PCs have been hurt, or they're investigating a point of interest and they're, like "I think we need to rest," *that* is when this move triggers.

When they announce that they want to Make Camp, think about where they are and what they are (or should be) worried about. Then ask them questions.

If *the route is perilous*, or if *they need to watch out for* ____, or if *they risk drawing the attention of* ____, then ask them how they address that.

If *it's cold*, ask them how they stay warm. If *they start a fire*, ask what they use for fuel or how they start it. If *it's wet*, ask them what they do (if anything) to stay dry.

Ask what precautions they take to keep animals out of their food. Ask them if they set a watch, and the order.

As you ask these questions and get their answers, be sure to **show downsides** to their stuff ("if you want to use a mess kit, you'll need to start a fire") and **tell them the consequences and ask** ("if you start a fire, you're more likely to attract attention... do you make one?"). But also, **offer them opportunities, with or without a cost** ("sure, you could look around for a better campsite, maybe Seek Insight, but it'll take some time and you might not find anything before dark").

Once they settle in, but before you decide what's going to happen during the night, ask if they want to Keep Company.

You decide what (if anything) happens during the night. Consider all the dangers you've established and the preparations that the party has made (or not made). Think about relevant threats and their grim portents. If it's obvious to you that a particular encounter would occur, then it occurs. Decide who's on watch when it happens, frame the scene, make an appropriate GM move, and play from there.

If you think that something *might* interrupt their rest, but you aren't sure, then call for the Die of Fate. Consider giving them advantage or disadvantage on the roll, depending on how well-prepared they are. Here's a general-purpose result table:

1d6	OCCURRENCE
1	Something dangerous approaches, inclined to do harm.
2	Something dangerous approaches, curious but not aggressive.
3	Something annoying happens (critters in the food, rain, an argument, etc.).
4-5	The night passes uneventfully.
6	They observe something interesting, find something useful, or otherwise gain some small boon; or the night passes uneventfully

For more about the benefits of Making Camp, see Harm & Healing (page XX).

Deprivation

If PCs don't get food, drink, or rest, then at first the only consequence is that they don't get to make a choice when they Make Camp. But the longer they go with insufficient food, water, or rest, the more danger they're in. Start by asking them to Defy Danger (the danger being their hunger, thirst, or exhaustion). Escalate with a debility, then more debilities. Make increasingly aggressive GM moves (**tell them the requirements or consequences, show downsides, reveal unwelcome truths**, etc.) as they endure more deprivation. Use the GM moves for afflictions (see **Threats**, page XX). Between sessions, write up their deprivation as a threat.

The party is en route to Marsbedge in early summer. The first two days were uneventful, but this is the first time we've seen Titan Bones on screen, and there's danger there, so I've zoomed in and they're Making Camp. We've already decided that they're making porridge with a mess kit, using fuel left in the wayside's common supplies. "But just enough to cook with," says Rhianna. "It's plenty warm. No need to announce our presence." They set a watch order.

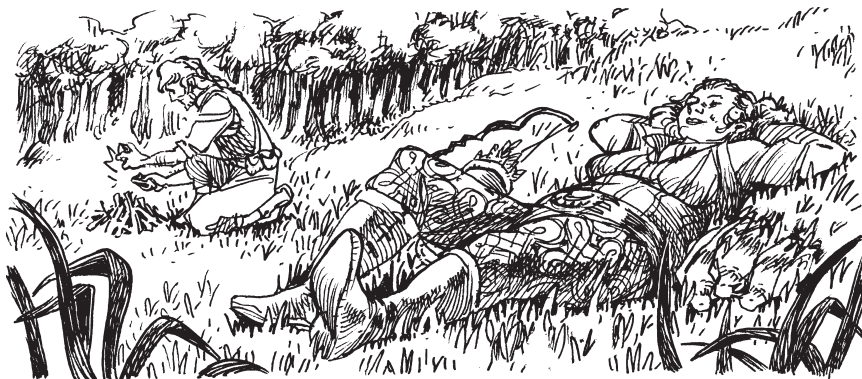
"Are you doing anything to prepare for the nosgolau?" I ask. Vahid rigs up some twine strung with little bells, propped up on blocks of firewood. "If anyone wanders off, they'll trip the wire and wake the rest of us." Nice.

We use the Keep Company move, and there's some delightful teen drama.

They settle in to sleep and I have to decide if and when the nosgolau show up. I'm pretty sure that they will. I ask Blodwen to roll the Die of Fate to see which watch they appear in, and I figure if she gets a 6 then I'll let them off easy. But, no, she rolls a 2. Vahid's shift.

I ask Vahid what he does to keep awake, and what he's thinking about, and then I introduce a danger. "Like an hour into your watch, you realize you're watching this light off in the distance, up on Titan Bones. And then it's closer, and you hear a whisper, someone calling your name. Someone who probably isn't there, but who you feel compelled to go to. Who is it?" Vahid says it's Isra, his best friend from long, long ago. There's a custom move for this, so I have Vahid roll +WIS and surprise, surprise, things don't go so well...

Expeditions



FORAGE

When you *spend a few hours seeking food in the wild*, roll +WIS. In winter, you have disadvantage. **On a 10+**, pick 2; **on a 7-9**, pick 1:

- ◎ You acquire ♡ provisions (1d6 uses)
- ◎ You acquire an extra 1d6 uses of provisions
- ◎ You discover something interesting or useful
- ◎ You avoid danger or risk (else, there is some)

Provisions can substitute for supplies when you Make Camp, 1-for-1.

This move represents one “party” going out to gather food. If two or more go together, one of them is Foraging while the other Aids. If they split up, they can each roll the move—potentially gathering more food but putting themselves in more danger.

It’s possible to travel while Foraging, but as a rule they’ll cover only half the distance they would otherwise.

On a 7+, let them roll to see how many uses of provisions are at stake before they make their choices. You might also reveal the danger, risk, or challenge (at least its general form). If they’re only getting a paltry 1 use of provisions, at the risk of getting lost, well... they might skip the danger, thank you very much.

Use the fiction, their choices, and the number of provisions at stake to fill in the details. If they get a 10+ and end up with 2d6 uses of provisions with a risk, then maybe they spot a big old buck and they have to bring it down. If they get just 1 or 2 uses and avoid danger or risk, then perhaps they found wild carrots and some birds’ eggs and so forth but the trip was otherwise uneventful. Feel free to ask the player what they found, especially if they avoided danger or risk.

On a miss, you might **reveal an unwelcome truth** that the land is barren or picked clean, or **show a downside** of their lack of experience in the wild, or **hurt someone** and have everyone in the party mark a debility from hunger. Or you could drop them right into a bad situation, like getting gored by a wild boar or surrounded by feathered drakes, and, hey, maybe they can score some provisions after all.

After a week on the road, mishap and misadventure have depleted the party's supplies. They're all out, and still a couple days from Marshedge. Rhianna goes a-hunting, bringing Andras with her.

"Are you, like, hunting game? Looking for plants to eat? What's the plan?"

"Hunting game. This is what we do back home for a living." Sure, of course. She rolls (with Aid from Andras) and gets a 10. They roll a 3 for provisions, and decide to avoid danger or risk.

"Well, that's not great. What do you think you brought down?"

"Probably just some birds," says Rhianna. "Maybe a few mourning doves?"

Works for me.

Meanwhile, Blodwen and Caradoc are foraging near the road, looking for edible plants and the like. Caradoc is Aiding; Blodwen rolls +WIS and gets an 8. They roll the d6, for 2 uses of provisions.

That's a small number, but Blodwen's trying to impress Caradoc. "What's the danger or challenge?" she asks.

"Hmm. Blodwen, on a hunch, you follow a swath of wildflowers up and around a curve in a hill, and there, coming from a dead old tree still gripping the side of the hill, there's a big buzzing sound. Bees! There's lots of honey in there, for sure, 2 uses of provisions, but you'll have to get it out. That's your challenge. Or you can turn around and go home safely but empty handed. What do you do?"

Later, after resupplying in Marshedge and heading out towards Three-Coven Lake, they once again find themselves short on food. Rhianna takes Andras hunting again, but the rest of them stay at camp. They're well off the roads, now, and don't want to take chances.

Rhianna and Andras roll to Forage and, alas, they get a 5. The party's getting close to Three-Coven Lake, less than a day away (not that they know that). My notes include a run-in with Hillfolk who are devoted to keeping people away from the lake, and this seems like a good time to spring it.

"Okay, it's a dreary, miserable day, but at least it's no longer raining. Rhianna, you and Andras have tracked a big old ram through the hills for a bit, and you finally brought it down while it was drinking from the stream. There's plenty of meat for the taking, like maybe 8 provisions worth? Andras has gone down to butcher the thing while you keep lookout."

*That's just me setting the scene. Now I use the Hillfolk's monster move, **outmaneuver their prey**, and I go hard. "You're scanning the hills around you, and then, like, out of nowhere, there's a mounted warrior on one of the peaks. A Hillfolk. He whistles, and as he does, you realize the trick—he's a distraction! You see Andras look up, too, and right then, an arrow comes from out of nowhere and tags him for 1d8 damage. Is he still up? Okay, cool, I think it took him in the leg, he's down and grabbing at it and his eyes are darting about in a panic, what do you do?"*

Going home

The PCs will eventually turn back and head for home. Now what?

The return journey

In general, gloss over the trip home. The points of interest that you described on the way out probably haven't changed much. They party already faced the challenges you established when they Charted a Course. The trip home might still be long, and grueling, and even dangerous, but unless there's something *new*, just handwave most of the journey.

The trip home is a time to ruminate and consider. Describe the journey at a high level, maybe asking the characters some questions. "Vahid, what part of that Green Lord's tomb do you keep thinking about?" "Blodwen, how are you feeling about Danu right now?" "Rhianna, Caradoc... what are you going to tell Wynfor's mom?"

Suggest that the group Keep Company. It's a great way to explore how the expedition has affected the PCs and their relationships. It also adds a sense of time passing.

If the party wraps up an expedition at or near the end of a session, then you might even skip the return trip entirely. Take care of any bookkeeping that would happen when they arrived home, either now or between sessions. Then start the next session with the PCs already at home, maybe with some time having passed. Some love letters (page **XX**) can be useful here!

Sometimes, though, returning home is as much of an adventure as the initial journey, maybe moreso. If the PCs...

- ... **bring something/someone back that makes the trip more difficult or dangerous** (like a few sledges full of bear meat or a pampered, whinging minstrel);
 - ... **are lost, badly injured, out of supplies, or hunted**;
 - ... **are racing to get home** before something bad happens; or
 - ... **return home by a different route**, with new challenges and points of interest...
- ... then Chart a Course back to Stonetop and play out the trip home just like you resolved the initial journey.

Arriving home

When the PCs get back home, consider:

Did they trigger any moves before they left that took time to resolve (like Pull Together)? Roll and resolve them now!

Did they Requisition town resources? If so, did they bring them back safely? If not, the town Meets with Disaster (page **XX**).

Did they Return Triumphant? If so, resolve that move now. See the next page.

Did any of your threats advance towards their impending dooms? Think about how you'll show the grim portents to the PCs.

How will various NPCs react to the PC's return? How will the PC's success or failure impact the town? How will you show this to the PCs?

From there, switch into "homefront" play. See page **XX** for details.

RETURN TRIUMPHANT

When you *return home in triumph*, having saved your fellows, put down the threat, seized an opportunity, etc., increase the steading's Fortunes by 1 (to a maximum of +3).

A successful adventure boosts morale and sets the PC's steading on the path towards prosperity—or at least it undoes some of the damage done by whatever disaster led to the expedition in the first place.

To trigger this move, the PCs' return must be *triumphant*, something that makes folks celebrate or at least talk excitedly. If crinwin steal an infant and the PCs go into the Wood after them, triumph means saving the kid. It doesn't mean killing a few crinwin and returning with the child's corpse.

You'll have to feel this out in play. If a stranger limps into town raving about the ghostly raiders who attacked his caravan, well, no one's expecting the PCs to save his companions. They're probably goners, and triumph means putting those raiders down. But if it was the town's logging camp in the Foothills that came under threat, triumph would mean getting most of the workers home safely, regardless of whether they took out raiders. Priorities!

When in doubt, put it to the table: if anyone (GM or player) thinks that the PCs' return isn't triumphant, then the move doesn't trigger.

Remember to **begin and end with the fiction**. Don't just increase the steading's Fortunes, say (or ask) what that looks like. Show off the tearful reunions and the celebrations. Have NPCs thank the PCs in public and private ways. **Bring it home!**

What if they... don't?

It's possible that the PCs might not *want* to return home. They might want to continue exploring an area, or resettle in a different town, or just leave and never come back.

To help prevent this, remember to **bring it home**. While the PCs are on an expedition, ask about NPCs that they care about. Remind them of their responsibilities back home. Ask them who or what they miss the most out here. Do this consistently, so that the PCs feel connected to the village. Returning home will feel like the obvious thing to do.

If they consider staying in the field, **remind them of the consequences**. Folks might assume that the PCs are dead, their jobs will go undone, less-competent folks might take charge, etc. Practically, the PCs won't be able to Outfit without access to a friendly town, or Level Up without at least a temporary home base.

That said, it's not your job to force them home, it's your job to **play to find out what happens**. Sometimes it makes sense for some or all of the PCs to stay in the field (for example, to unite the Hillfolk against the southern slavers) or to leave town for good (because, say, the Seeker has become a liability). This might mean the end of the campaign, or the end of a particular PC's story. But it might also mean some significant change to the game plays. See "Making Stonetop Yours" for ideas (page XX).

Expeditions

What to prep

If you know that an expedition is in the PC's future, there's plenty you can prepare in advance. You don't *need* to prepare these things, but prep can help make the journey go more smoothly in play.

First, **chart the course**. Look at where they're going, their likely route(s), and make your choices for the Chart a Course move. Write them down with little check boxes next to them, so you can tick them off as you present them in play.

Next, **draw a map** of the route that you expect them to take or the area you expect them to traverse. Grab a map of the vicinity around Stonetop or the World's End region and highlight or add the points of interest relevant to the journey. Consider making a more zoomed-in map for areas that aren't very well detailed on the regional map.

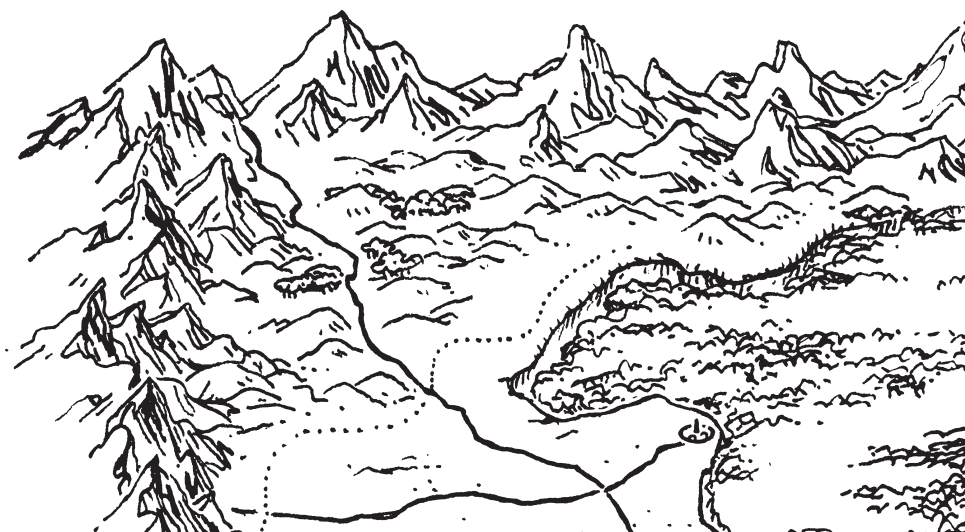
Identify your points of interest, including...

- ... any landmark that has not yet been seen in play (or that has changed since the PC's last visit);
- ... any specific places where you plan to frame a scene and make a GM move; and...
- ... the journey's destination.

Then identify the **legs of travel** between each point of interest. Note how long the leg will likely take.

For each leg of travel or point of interest, make a few notes:

- ⊙ A brief description, no more than a sentence.
- ⊙ 2-3 impressions, ideally hitting senses other than visual.
- ⊙ Some questions you want to ask of the players.
- ⊙ Any challenges (from Chart a Course) that you plan to introduce there.
- ⊙ Any other dangers or discoveries you expect to be encountered there.



For regions or locations described in the almanac, you can either copy the relevant details or just add a page reference to your notes (and maybe put a sticky on the page in the setting guide). Feel free to add questions or other details of your own devising! Prepare up to 7 **possible encounters** that could occur along the journey—dangers, discoveries, or events you can use when the characters miss a roll, when a 7-9 implies some sort of complication, or when you just need to break up the journey a bit.

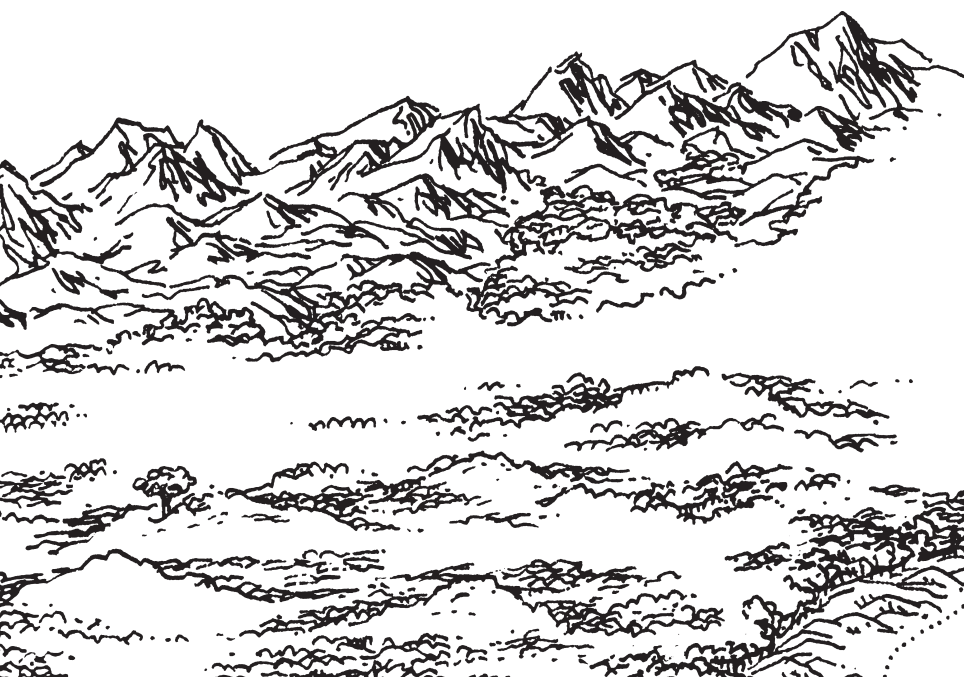
For each encounter, limit yourself to 1-3 sentences but try to tie them into a larger story. For creatures, include a disposition or activity—what are they up to and how are they likely to react to the characters? For any encounter, use it to show the characters (and more importantly, the players) the bigger picture. For example, don't just have

them encounter a random hagr; have them encounter a hagr who is sullenly building a new home for itself because the Mother of Spiders and her brood chased it out of its old home.

Consider making a Die of Fate table for the weather (page **XX**), for events while they make camp (page **XX**), or for encounters they might have while traveling through a perilous area (page **XX**).

Create each **Site** (page **XX**), **Danger** (page **XX**), **Discovery** (page **XX**), and **NPC** (page **XX**), they are likely to encounter, in as much or as little detail as you feel valuable and appropriate.

Finally, write up any NPCs or followers that you expect to join the party (page **XX**).



Expeditions

Let's think back to the first adventure. Crinwin (in service to a hypnotic, child-collecting swyn) are going to abduct Pryder. Rheinal, Pryder's father, will stagger back into town, injured and covered in crinwin blood. I expect the PCs to track the crinwin and try to rescue Pryder.

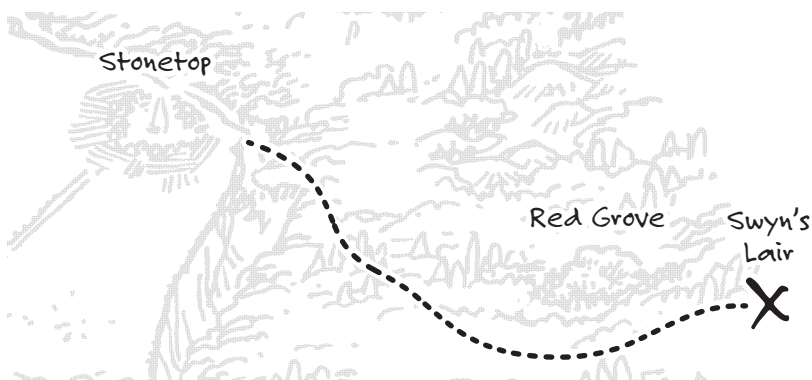
I Chart a Course in advance, writing down these requirements:

- You must first travel to the scene of Pryder's abduction, and follow the tracks from there
- You'll need to bring a decent tracker
- It'll probably take at least a day there and back, maybe more
- You risk getting lost (losing the trail)
- You'll need to watch out for crinwin (obviously) and other dangers of the Wood like nailadd, feathered drakes, and fae
- You risk drawing the attention of crinwin

Next, I zoom in a little on the "Vicinity" map and expand it a little, showing the path that the crinwin took and the nearby landmarks (the Red Grove).

I list my points of interest and legs of travel:

- * **The Stream.** *It'll be the first time they cross the Stream in play. I note its page number in the almanac and skim it.*
- * **The Great Wood** (~1 hour). *This will be the first time exploring the Wood in play. I crib impressions and questions from the almanac, and add "What sign of a warm, early spring do you notice?"*
- * **Scene of Pryder's abduction.** *I jot down some impressions ("Blood on the stone that hit Rheinal" and "Pryder's crinwin-charm, discarded in the brush"). I'll ad-lib any investigation that they do, but this is where they'll find the trail.*
- * **Following the trail** (~5 hours). *More travel through the Great Wood. They risk getting lost here. They'll pass by the Red Grove, so I skim the entry in the almanac, but I doubt they'll go there.*
- * **Camp site.** *Not a specific location, but they'll need to Make Camp. I'll play the location by ear, but they'll need to watch out for crinwin or other dangers.*



- * *More trail (4-5 hours). I'll ask some questions like "What's the worst part of hiking through the forest?" and "What do you find yourself missing from home?"*
- * *Old Crinwin Nest. Like a giant wasp hive, torn apart by crinwin under Sajra's sway; signs of crinwin killing each other.*
- * *More trail (4-5 hours). They're getting closer, so they risk drawing attention of crinwin as they travel.*
- * *The Swyn's Lair. An old Green Lord barrow. I'll work this up as a full-fledged site for them to explore.*

For possible encounters, I come up with the following list.

- * *Three feathered drakes roaming the area, hunting deer & wisents; catch the PCs' scent and think they look slow and tasty.*
- * *The crinwin that Rheinal wounded, dead and abandoned by the others.*
- * *A spiteful spriggan, Thornthumb; kicked out of the Maker-tomb by (and lost his hoard to) the swyn; tries to steal from PCs; willing to help against swyn but will ultimately swindle/betray them.*
- * *An old Maker-ruin just off the tracks; old Forest Folk glyphs on trees/rocks nearby; half-dozen crinwin are excavating it on Sajra's behalf*
- * *Crinwin, loyal to Sajra the Swyn, on patrol or keeping watch.*

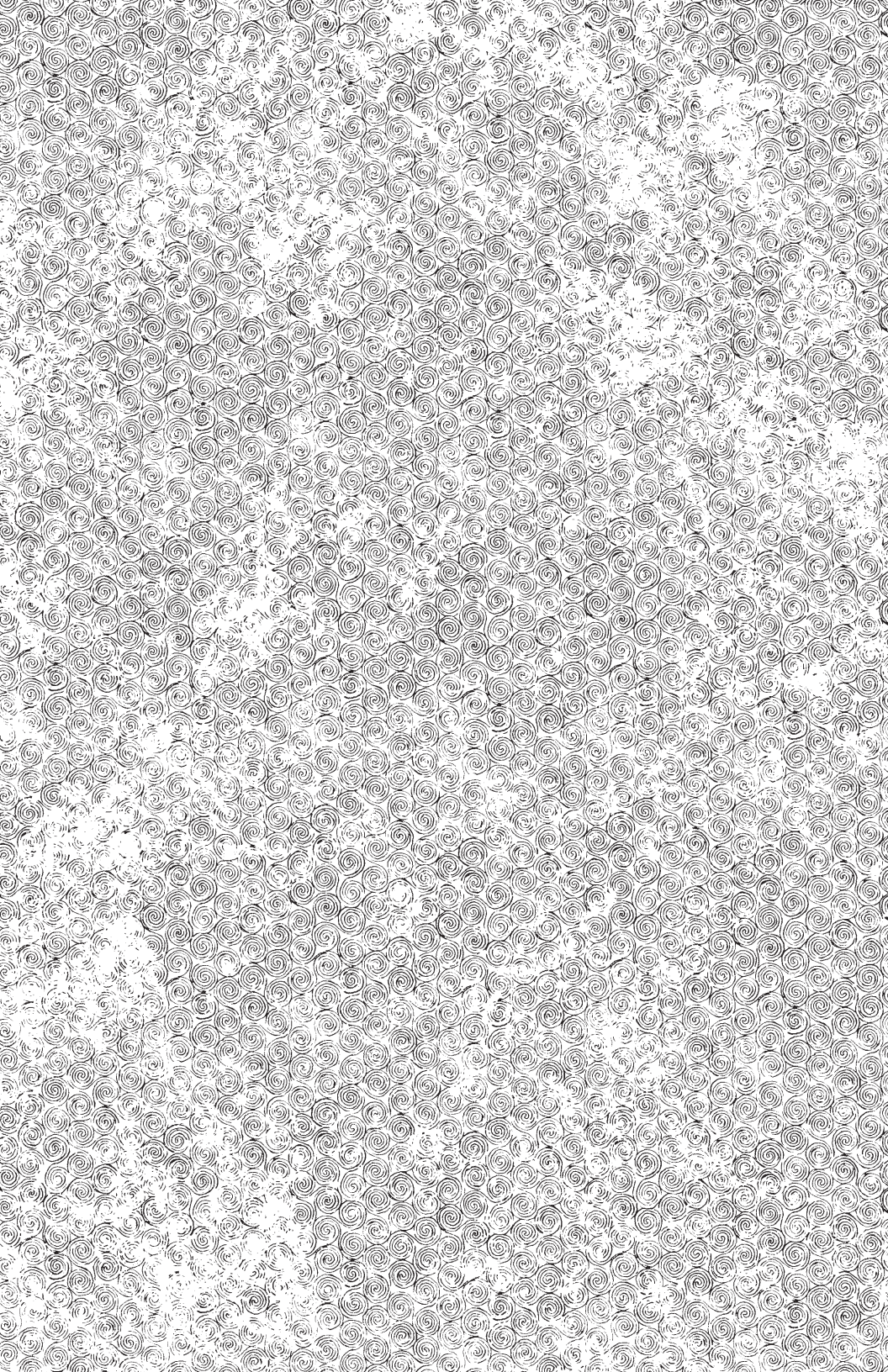


I find the monster stats for feathered drakes, crinwin, nailladd, spriggan, and swyn in the almanac. I put little sticky flags on each one.

I spend a fair bit of time creating the swyn's lair as a site (see page XX). I also make some notes about the abandoned crinwin nest and the older Maker-ruins. I write up some dangers and discoveries for each.

I make some notes on portraying NPCs: Thornthumb, the missing kids (Pryder and Brynfor), and Rheinal (Pryder's father). Rheinal might join the PCs, and he'll take orders, so I write him up as a follower.

I'm ready to go.



Dangers



Hazards
Monsters

Dangers

Dangers are likely to hurt the PCs or the things they care about. There are two basic types of danger:

Hazards are environmental dangers, like traps, treacherous terrain, or weather.

Monsters are active dangers, usually things with intent; adversaries that the PCs can fight (or fight off).

PCs usually encounter dangers when they're on an expedition, or when things get bad and a danger shows up in town. Ultimately, they're just elements of the fiction: you frame a scene that includes a danger (or introduce one into a scene), you describe the situation, you make a move using the danger, and you ask "what do you do?" Go from there.

Like any element of the fiction, dangers can be improvised. Much of this chapter, though, focuses on preparing dangers in advance. The last chunk of the chapter deals with running fights.

Dangers vs. threats

Dangers may or may not also be threats (see page **XX**). Threats are ongoing problems, things that will come back to haunt the PCs later; they might not be dangerous, but they're always troublesome. Dangers are immediate problems: things that can hurt or hinder the PCs during a scene, here and now.

Ultimately, the difference is what you prep. Your prep for a threat tells you what they're up to, what sort of trouble they might cause, how that trouble will escalate and where it's ultimately going. Your prep for a danger tells you how to use a hazard or monster here and now, in a scene.

Lots of threats are also things that the PCs might fight. If they are, write up a monster description for them (see page **XX**) or find an appropriate entry in the almanacs. Lots of monsters that the PCs encounter might become threats later. If they do, write them up as a threat between sessions.

Hazards

Hazards are environmental dangers. They can impede or harm the PCs but lack initiative and intent. Hazards can't really be fought and slain with spear and shield; they must be avoided, endured, thwarted, or overcome.

Improvising a hazard

Hazards don't always need game mechanics or stats. You'll often just improvise them.

To improvise a hazard: imagine a physical obstacle or danger that would make sense in the environment. Then, frame a scene (if you haven't already) and make a GM move to introduce the hazard. Ask the PCs what they do. If they ask clarifying questions, make up answers that make sense but then act as if they were true all along. If the PCs do something with an obvious outcome, say what happens. If they trigger a player move, resolve it. Use your knowledge of the situation and your sense of the fiction to describe what happens next.

When the players try to bypass or overcome a hazard, you should regularly **tell them the consequences/requirements and ask** if they still want to do that. Players should understand the risks before they commit to any course of action—even if the risks are “you aren't sure what will happen.”

Clever players will often come up with ways to bypass a hazard that don't trigger a move. Resist the urge to call for a move (like Defy Danger or Struggle as One) just because you think “there should be a roll.” Always confirm that the trigger is, in fact, being met. Otherwise, you'll end up invalidating the players' creativity and you might find yourself struggling to come up with meaningful results on a 7-9 or 6-.

You can also introduce hazards in response to a player move. A new hazard is a great consequence on a 7-9 roll to Defy Danger (“You get past the thug, but the lamp tips onto the mattress—it's on fire!”). When someone Seeks Insight and asks, “What should I be on the lookout for?” make up a hazard and tell them about it. If they're traveling cross-country and someone gets a 6- on pretty much anything, you could **introduce a danger** and have the sky open up in a torrent of rain.

Remember that on a 6-, when you make a hard GM move and establish badness, you decide just how bad it is. That means you can introduce a hazard and immediately have it cause harm or badness, as long as it makes sense in the fiction. But you don't have to. So when the Fox rolls a 6- to Burgle a chest, you might jump straight to **hurting them** with a poison needle trap. But you could also **introduce a danger** and say that they notice these arcane runes around the lip, and clearly some sort of harmful magic will be unleashed if the chest is opened, what do you do?

When a hazard is present during a fight or any other sort of action scene, keep including it in the fiction and keep making moves with it. A hazard is part of the environment and the **fictional positioning** (page XX) of the characters; its presence limits what the PCs can do and informs the results of their actions.

Dangers



Vahid, Caradoc, Blodwen, Rhianna, and Andras are exploring the ruins around Three-Coven Lake. They're climbing a set of wide, ancient stairs going up the side of a bluff. It'd be a nasty fall into rocky water, but the stairs so far have been well-built and stable.

*I decide to change that, and **introduce a danger**. "The stairs and bluff curve inward, away from the lake, then the stairs level off to a short landing. Vahid, you're in front, so you see this first. The landing has partially collapsed, and while there's enough left to scamper across, it doesn't look entirely stable. The stairs on the other end look fine, though. What do you do?"*

They ask some questions about the drop (like 50 or 60 feet, onto rocks) and the size of the landing (originally about 12 feet square, but there's only like 2 or 3 feet left for most of it, up against the cliff wall, and a gap of almost 9 feet).

"Only 9 feet? So we can just jump it, right?" says Caradoc.

I tell them the consequences and ask. "It's certainly jumpable, but it's not a sure thing. You'll each have to Defy Danger, and anyone with a normal or heavy load will be at disadvantage. Oh, and I don't think Andras can make it—he's still nursing that arrow wound in his leg, right? But the rest of you can try if you want. What do you do?"

They decide against jumping it. Vahid pokes the landing with his spear and otherwise takes in the situation, Seeking Insight. He gets a 7-9. "What here is useful or valuable to me?" he asks.

I think about the situation and make a decision (remember, I'm making this up as I go). "Well, the ledge that remains should bear your weight if you go one at a time, but it's impossible to tell. But when you look closely, you realize that the cliff face has some ridges that could be used as handholds. Oh, and if you've got any rope in your gear, that could be useful, too."

*I then **offer riches at a price** and say that he can see the rest of the stairs from here. "They appear to be intact all the way up to the next opening carved into the cliff, an ornate arch carved with Maker runes. What do you do?"*

"I really want to check that out," says Vahid. After some discussion, they produce some rope and tie each other together, then scamper over the ledge one at a time, using the handholds to brace themselves. The rope means that they're Defying Danger as a group, so we resolve this using Struggle as One (and decide that everyone gets advantage on their rolls for acting on the answers from Seeking Insight).

Damage from hazards

If a hazard (improvised or prepared) deals damage, ask yourself what it could likely do to a normal person.

WORST OUTCOME	DIE
Bruises & scrapes, pain, light burns	d4
Nasty flesh wounds, bruises, burns	d6
Broken bones, bad burns, debilitating pain	d8
Death or dismemberment	d10

Then, assign effects to the hazard according to its capabilities (choose all that apply):

IF...	EFFECT
... armor can't protect against it	ignores armor
... it slices through leather/hide	1 piercing, messy
... it can tear metal apart	3 piercing, messy
... it knocks them down or around	forceful
... it's big/vicious/scary	+2 damage
... the PCs have taken precautions	disadvantage
... it catches them off-guard	advantage

Apply disadvantage to the damage roll if the PCs knew (or suspected) about the hazard and proactively did something to protect themselves. For example, if the hazard is a poisonous gas and they cover their faces and mouths with damp cloth before entering it, impose disadvantage on the damage roll. By contrast, if the hazard catches them flat-footed, hurting them even before they realize it's there, then apply advantage to the damage roll.

Certain death

If a hazard (or other source of harm) would definitely, absolutely kill a normal person, then it shouldn't deal damage to the PCs—it should immediately reduce them to 0 HP and trigger the Death's Door move. If they survive, then that means they caught a break. You can and should still **hurt them**, badly.

Telegraph this sort of hazard very clearly. “If you fall, I'll probably give you one chance to catch yourself. But if that fails, it's a 60-foot drop onto jagged rocks and shallow water. You won't be taking HP damage, you'll be rolling Death's Door. You sure you want to do this?”



Dangers

Preparing hazards

If you're preparing an expedition or a point of interest in advance, you might want to prepare some hazards. Prep hazards for all the reasons you prep anything: to give yourself interesting stuff to say, to speed up play, to shore up your weaknesses, to hone your craft, and to give yourself permission to play hard and visit badness on the PCs.

Prep your hazards as much as or as little as you find valuable. Remember that prep is for your benefit; unless you're making notes for someone else to use, there's little point in writing down stuff that's obvious to you.

There are a few approaches to preparing hazards. You might prepare one as...

- ... a detailed description;
- ... a series of GM moves, possibly with an instinct;
- ... an impending doom (with grim portents);
- ... one or more player-facing moves; or...
- ... some combination of the above.

There's no hard and fast rule for when to use each approach. Use whichever one seems most appropriate for the hazard you have in mind.

As a detailed description

Think about the hazard and its specific fictional details: Where is it? What does it look like? How does it work? What triggers it? What does it do? You might just visualize it in your mind, or jot some notes down, or even draw a picture or diagram.

In play, introduce this kind of hazard much like you would if you were improvising it. Frame a scene where the hazard is relevant, introduce it with a GM move, ask "what do you do?" Answer the players' questions and resolve their actions based on your understanding of the hazard.

This approach tends to be good for traps, because it means taking time in advance to think through how the trap works. When you improvise a trap, it's easy to make up details that don't make sense under scrutiny.

This approach is also good for physical obstacles, especially ones that aren't particularly dynamic (like a chasm they might want to cross, or a tree they might want to climb). Having thought through the physical space allows you to easily answer the players' questions and resolve their actions.

For our first adventure, there's a ruined crinwin nest that the PCs might encounter en route to Sajra the swyn's lair.

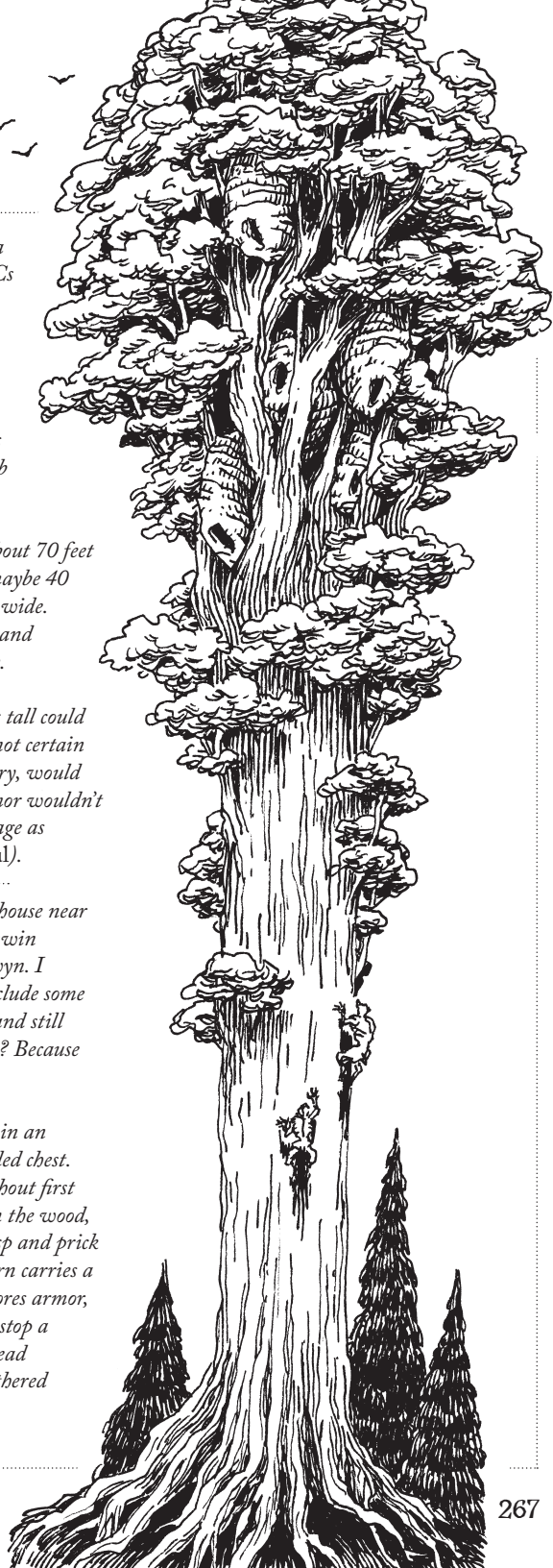
I suspect that the PCs might want to investigate the nest, or set fire to it, but I know that it's high up in a huge tree. The climb would definitely be a bazard.

I make some notes: the nest is about 70 feet up, and the lowest boughs are maybe 40 feet. The trunk is maybe 10 feet wide. I look up sequoia redwood trees and make a little sketch for reference.

A fall while climbing a tree this tall could definitely kill a person, but it's not certain death. It's definitely big and scary, would knock someone around, and armor wouldn't help against it, so I set the damage as $1d10+2$ (ignores armor, forceful).

There's also an old Maker greenhouse near Sajra's lair, which enslaved crinwin have been excavating for the swyn. I decided earlier that it would include some old magical seeds, locked away and still unpilfered by the crinwin. Why? Because they're protected by a trap!

I think that the seeds are stored in an impossibly well-preserved wooded chest. If anyone disturbs the clasp without first pressing two particular knots in the wood, a thorn will shoot out of the clasp and prick whoever is handling it. The thorn carries a lethal poison ($d10$ damage, ignores armor, will quickly necrotize flesh and stop a heart if not treated). There's a dead crinwin in the room with a withered black hand; it tried to open the chest earlier.



Dangers

As GM moves

Think about how the hazard works and—more importantly—how you intend to use it in play. Write out a series of fairly specific GM moves that reflect as many of the following as make sense:

- ⊙ How the hazard's presence is fore-shadowed or revealed
- ⊙ How the hazard harms or hinders
- ⊙ How the hazard escalates or gets worse
- ⊙ How the hazard might thwart attempts to overcome it.

Consider adding conditional triggers to each of these moves, as a reminder of when to use them.

If the hazard is dynamic and changing (like a storm, an avalanche, a wildfire, etc.), give it an instinct, written in the format “to [do something].” During play, use the hazard's instinct as a guide to how it behaves. If you're not sure what a hazard is going to do next, do whatever its instinct suggests.

Why use this approach? Mostly, because it helps you hone your craft. You can think through pacing and escalation in advance, rather than under pressure during play. This sort of prep can also make it easier to **let things burn**; if you write a move like “slice off a limb” when you prep the hazard in advance, you'll be more likely to actually do that during play.

That old ruined greenhouse that the crinwin are excavating has a number of animate, aggressive, vines that could cause all sorts of trouble for the PCs. I first consider writing them up as monsters, but I realize that they can't really be fought... no matter how many vines they chop through, there will be more! Instead, I write the vines up as a hazard with the following GM moves:

- * Make quiet noises as they slowly grow and creep (how it's fore-shadowed)
- * Seem to be moving, but stop when looked at directly (how it's fore-shadowed)
- * Reveal a mass of vines entwining a desiccated crinwin corpse (how it's foreshadowed)
- * Slip a tendrill around a limb, slowly and quietly (how it hinders)
- * Sprout thorns and inject a numbing, euphoric poison (how it harms)
- * Lash out with more tendrils to subdue struggling prey (how it escalates)

I also give it an instinct: “to ensnare.”

I'm not seeing this hazard as doing damage—it just restrains prey, makes it bliss out and stop struggling, and then slowly suffocates it. I figure that anyone who gets injected with the euphoric poison will need to Defy Danger to do anything other than relax and enjoy themselves.

As an impending doom

Write a series of increasingly bad events, ending with some final doom.

Start by imagining the final, ultimate bad thing that can happen and write a short description, like “The throne room collapses.” Then, write 1–4 grim portents, events that represent how the hazard starts and how it escalates. Pair each portent with damage and tags, if appropriate.

Put one or more check boxes next to each grim portent (multiple check boxes means that portent happens multiple times). End with the impending doom. In play, when you make a GM move, you can **advance towards impending doom** and have the next event happen.

Optionally, you can write triggers that cause the doom to get closer. The trigger might be fictional (“each time there’s a loud noise or powerful blow”) or mechanical (“each time someone rolls doubles”).

During play, consider making the number of check boxes in the impending doom public. This can ratchet up the tension and it lets the players make decisions based on how much time they have (or don’t have).

Sajra the swyn’s lair is an old Green Lord tomb, buried by ages of forest growth. One of the chambers features a cracked, sagging roof held aloft by three ancient wooden pillars (and a fourth that collapsed many years ago). Some of Sajra’s crinwin have started building nests around the remaining pillars, further weakening them.

The PCs are likely to get into a fight with the crinwin in this chamber, and the pillars could easily be harmed and start collapsing. I write up the hazard like this:

Advance this each time one of the pillars is struck, or whenever it feels right:

- A pillar cracks and buckles; dirt pours from ceiling
- A pillar breaks; slabs fall (d8+1 damage, forceful)
- Another pillar breaks; the ceiling starts to collapse (d10+1 damage, forceful)
- IMPENDING DOOM: the room collapses, burying anyone still within (Death’s Door); connecting tunnels are blocked off

Dangers

As player moves

Write a custom player-facing move to reflect the hazard (or part of it), like “When you *breathe in the horrible stench of the Maw*, roll +CON....” When the PCs encounter the hazard and the move becomes relevant, share it with the players. Resolve it like you would any other player-facing move.

A player-facing move is a great way to establish and communicate stakes. You can tell a player that they’ll have to Defy Danger to leap across the chasm, but unless you also tell them what will happen on a 10+, a 7-9, and 6-, they don’t *really* know the risks. With a custom move, you can bake the stakes right in.

Player moves are also a good way to handle “weird” hazards, like magic that messes with their minds or that follows strange rules of cause-and-effect. A player move can abstract these situations and give them a vague, dreamlike quality.

Remember: everything **begins and ends with the fiction**. If the PCs come up with a clever way to bypass a hazard or its trigger, then your move might no longer apply. That’s great. Don’t negate their choices, their creativity, or their abilities just because you’ve got a cool custom move you want to use.

For guidelines on writing custom moves, see page **XX**.

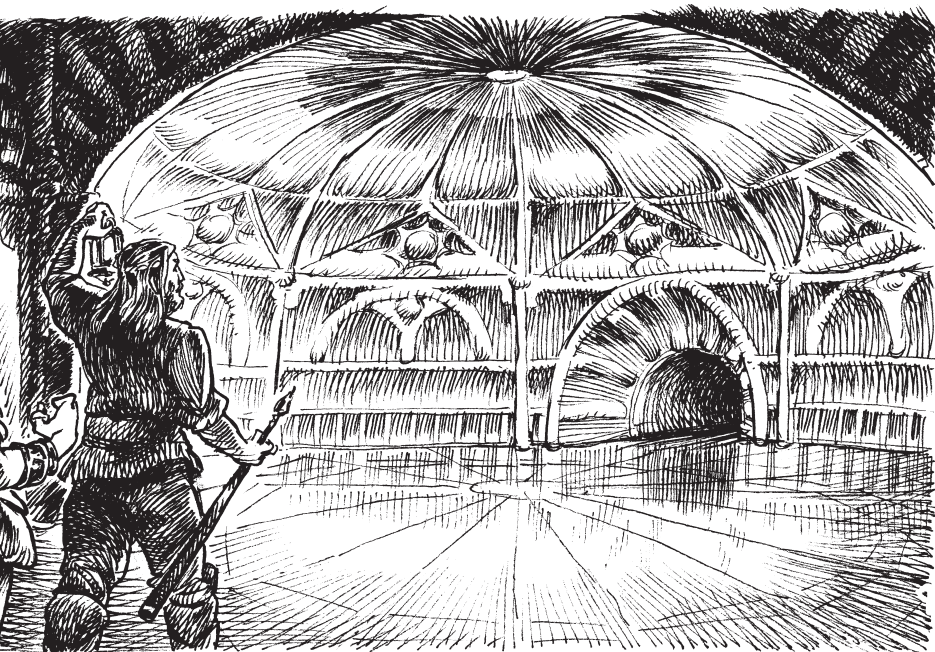
As a combination

Many hazards will work best as a combination of these approaches. You might start with a detailed description of a trapped chamber, then add a player-facing move for what happens when they try to bypass the trap in a particular way. Or you might write up a series of GM moves and an instinct for a wildfire, plus a countdown describing how the fire spreads. Get creative.



I previously wrote up the ruined crin-win nest—and the climb to reach it—as just a detailed description. I noted that it might do 1d10+3 damage on a fall, but thinking about it more, the fall could easily kill someone or seriously injure them. I want the PCs to know just how dangerous the climb could be, so I write up this custom move:

When you fall from the boughs of the tree, take 1d10+3 damage (ignores armor, forceful) and roll +CON: on a 10+, you’re bruised and bleeding and in a lot of pain, but miraculously nothing’s busted; on a 7-9, something’s broken—ask the GM what; on a 6-, you landed bad and you’re at Death’s Door.



Sajra's lair is an old Green Lord tomb, and the mummified Maker is still ensconced in its central vault. To reach the vault, one must pass through the Hall of Humility and the Hall of Gratitude. They are warded with fae magic to ensure that those who approach the vault do so with proper respect. I decide to write these hazards as custom moves.

When you enter the Hall of Humility, choose 1:

- * Tell us of a moment that left you feeling humbled and small before the natural world; you may then proceed to the Hall of Gratitude.
- * Tell us of a personal triumph, a moment that fills you with pride and self-satisfaction; you then exit the Hall of Humility and find yourself back in the antechamber.

When you enter the Hall of Gratitude, you see a shifting tableau of ancient peoples living and learning at the feet of tall, magnificent beings. Roll twIs: on a 10+, you witness someone learning a skill or trade that is nowadays taken for granted—describe the scene, then move on to the Hall of Offering; on a 7-9, you find yourself living one of these ancient lives—describe the task you are performing for the Makers and how you realize that this life isn't yours, then mark Dazed and move on to the Hall of Offering; on a 6-, the tableau shifts and you find yourself living a life of savagery, brutality, sickness, hunger, and want—tell us a hardship you experience most cruelly, and mark all three debilities. Then tell us how you find your true self again, and move on to the Hall of Offering.

Monster format

Almanac entries in *The Wider World* include many monster write-ups like this—use them when you can, either as-is or slightly modified.

① **Icon:** a quick visual identifier for different monster types, used for monsters entries in the almanac. You don't need to include these in monsters you write up.

① **Name:** what the monster is called (by itself, by the people who deal with it most, or by you, the GM, for your own reference).

② **Tags:** terms that help describe the monster. All monsters have an organization tag (*solitary*, *group*, or *horde*) that indicates how they hunt and fight; many have a size tag (*tiny*, *small*, *large*, or *huge*) that describe how big they are. Other tags describe a monster's basic nature (e.g. *construct*, *spirit*, *undead*), its traits (e.g. *stealthy*, *terrifying*), or its behaviors (e.g. *organized*, *cautious*). See page **XX** for descriptions.

③ **Hit points (HP) and Armor:** how much damage the monster can take, and how well protected it is. When a monster is reduced to 0 HP, it's out of the action (unconscious, disabled, dying, or dead—your call). When a monster suffers damage, reduce that damage by its Armor. The description after the Armor rating describes its source, and any exceptions.



Crinwin ①

Horde, small, hoarder, cautious, stealthy

③ **HP** 3; **Armor** 1 (reflexes)

④ **Damage** claws, rocks, choking d6 (*band*)

⑤ **Special quality** climbs/jumps like a squirrel

⑥ **Instinct** to covet

- Mimic noises, words, cries for help
- Hide or vanish into the trees
- Snatch something and dart away

⑧ They've always been there, in the Wood, lurking in the trees. For generations, the Forest Folk hunted them and kept their numbers in check. No longer.

- ⊗ Out-of-place noises: partial bird calls, off-season insect buzz, a bear's growl from the treetops, snippets of nonsense speech
- ⊗ Figures scurrying, leaping, swinging through the branches
- ⊗ Sinewy strong fingers around your throat
- ⊗ Clammy, blackish blood; too cold and putrid to be natural

Something interesting: there's something that everyone agrees will keep crinwin at bay (a smell, a charm, a sound, a little ritual, etc.). What is it, and why are you sure that it's next to worthless?

Something useful: there really is something that keeps crinwin at bay, but it involves something uncommon, impractical, or both. What is it, and why isn't it common knowledge (or at least commonly accepted)?

- ④ **Damage:** how the monster typically attacks, the damage it does, and the tags associated with that damage (see page **XX** for descriptions).
- ⑤ **Special qualities:** (optional) innate traits that impact play but aren't otherwise obvious or described by tags. Special qualities can be advantageous ("echolocation" or "immune to heat/fire"), disadvantageous ("blind" or "vulnerable to water/cold"), or neutral ("made of crystalline rock"). These aren't GM moves, per se, but they can and should inform the fiction that you establish and the GM moves that you make.
- ⑥ **Instinct:** what the monster typically does that makes it come into conflict with others. Use its instinct as a guide to its behavior. When you're not sure how a monster would act, do what its instinct suggests.
- ⑦ **Moves:** GM moves that you can make with this monster. You're not limited to these moves—you can and will use all your standard GM moves like **announce trouble** or **use up their resources**—but monster moves describe specific ways that the monster fights or causes trouble.
- ⑧ **Description:** a short description of the monster's physical form, its habitat, behaviors, or nature.
- ⑨ **Optional elements:** including lore (something interesting and something useful, for when someone Knows Things), or custom player moves (e.g., "When you lock eyes with the swyn, roll...").

Monsters

Monsters are active dangers—things that the PCs can fight (or at least fight off). They are usually animate and sentient, or close enough. It's a game term more than anything else, covering beasts and people, constructs and spirits, and actually monstrous foes.

At left is an example monster, fully prepped, with its individual elements called out.



Creating monsters

Whenever you prep a threat or an expedition, and you identify something that the PCs are likely to fight, either find its monster entry in the almanac or create the monster yourself.

As I've planned my first adventure, I've identified a number of monsters that the PCs might encounter: crinwin, nailadd, feathered drakes, and of course the swyn itself. All of these monsters have write-ups in the almanacs, so I'll just use those.

Sajra the swyn's lair is an ancient Green Lord tomb, and in preparing the site, I also decided that the final entrance to the actual burial vault would be guarded by two powerful fae servants. None of the fae described in the almanac fit the bill, so I'll make them from scratch.

To create a monster:

- 1) Conceptualize it
- 2) Name it
- 3) Give it tags
- 4) Calculate hit points
- 5) Calculate Armor
- 6) Calculate damage
- 7) Write special qualities
- 8) Write its instinct
- 9) Write its moves
- 10) Describe it
- 11) Write any appropriate optional elements: lore, player-facing moves, etc.

If you're improvising a monster during play, just quickly conceptualize it (step 1) and then calculate its HP, Armor, and damage (steps 4-6). Use your standard GM moves to run it for now. If it becomes a recurring foe, take time during a break or between sessions to flesh it out with more details.

1 Concept

Before you do anything else, imagine the monster. What is it? What does it look like? What does it do? Does it live alone or with others? How does it fight, eat, and live?

You'll usually have some ideas for the monster when you start this process. If you're stuck, look at an appropriate almanac entry and (if there is one) consult its tables. Roll or choose a theme or two for your monster, and use that to help flesh out the concept.

Another trick is to pick a monster from more traditional fantasy settings, something that isn't present in *Stonetop*. Identify what you find most interesting about it (its look, its powers, its symbolic meaning, its behaviors or relationships to others, etc.) and craft a similar monster that "fits" into the mythos of *Stonetop*. For example, if you're a big fan of ropers (cavern-dwelling monsters that look like giant stalagmites), you might decide to place something like that in *Labyrinth*, keeping its powers but changing its lore to align it with the Things Below.

You should have a decent grasp on the monster's concept before you move on. Your concept might change and evolve as you work, but this process fleshes out a concept that you already have. It doesn't generate the concept for you.

I want two powerful fae guardians to protect the Green Lord's burial vault. They'll appear in the Hall of Offerings and greet anyone who makes it through the Halls of Humility and Gratitude. I know that they're loyal to their Green Lord master, and that they control access to both its constructed afterlife and its actual, physical burial vault.

For a physical appearance, I lean on the Green Lord themes of "plants and growing things" and "chimarae," plus the fae tendency to blur binaries. I'm picturing tall, powerfully built humanoids with flesh like wood, sprouting elk-like antlers.

From the fae themes, I pick "fluidity of time and space." I think that they can basically twist and teleport intruders around, and can appear or disappear as they please within their realm. I also choose "debts/vows/obligations" and think that they extract promises from those who come before them.

Dangers

2 Name

You'll want a way to refer to the monster, at least in your own notes. Write it down.

If the monster has a proper name that it goes by, call it that, maybe with a short description. For example, "Sajra the Swyn" or "Daedre the Red, bandit leader." Pick proper names from an appropriate name list or almanac entry, or make up something similar.

If the monster is known to the people of Stonetop, and it's something they consider mundane or commonplace, then give it a simple, descriptive name in plain English (like "feathered drake" or "butcherbird").

If the monster is surrounded in mystery, a thing of rumor and legend, then give it a Welsh-sounding name (like "nailadd" or "ceffylwraig"). Come up with a word or description in English associated with the monster, then run it through an online translation service. Combine and tweak the resulting translation (or try other phrases) until you find have something that sounds good and is simple enough to use in play. (You can use this technique to come up with proper names, too.)

For monsters that are known to another people (like the Hillfolk or the Manmarchers), use a similar process as above but (for mysterious, rumored monsters) translate the English description into a language appropriate for the people or region. If it's a mysterious monster known to...

- ... **the Hillfolk**, then translate it into Breton and drop some of the vowels, giving it a clipped, truncated sound.
- ... **Marshedge**, then translate it into Irish.
- ... **the Manmarchers**, then translate it into German.
- ... **the folk of Barrier Pass**, then translate it into Nepali or Tibetan.
- ... **Lygos or other parts south**, then translate it into Greek, Hebrew, Persian, or Arabic.
- ... **the folk of Gordin's Delve**, then decide which immigrant group originally named it, and translate it as above.

For monsters that are unknown and unnamed, give them spooky, descriptive titles in plain English, like "The Shadowy Presence" or "The Killing Frost" or "The Thing in the White Well."

For my fae guardians, I think that they share a title, bestowed on them by their Green Lord master—something like "the horned trees" or "the offering trees." I try translating a few words into Slovak and find that "gift" can translate to "darček" and "trees" translates into "stromy." I combine and simplify the two words to become "the Darstrom."

I write down the Darstrom, guardian fae as their name.

3 Tags

Assemble a list of tags by answering the following questions.

How does it hunt or fight? (pick 1) TAG

In large groups (6 or more)	<i>horde</i>
In small groups (2-5 per group)	<i>group</i>
By itself	<i>solitary</i>

If an individual monster is part of a group, but it still fights or hunts mostly on its own, then give it the *solitary* tag (and appropriate HP and damage ratings; see below).

How big is it? (pick 1) TAG

Cat-sized or smaller	<i>tiny</i>
Like a human child	<i>small</i>
Adult human-sized	-
Like a horse, cart, etc.	<i>large</i>
Like an elephant, or bigger	<i>huge</i>

What is its nature?

(add all that apply) TAG

Lacks physical form	<i>spirit</i>
Between physical and spiritual	<i>fae</i>
Made by someone	<i>construct</i>
Alien to this world	<i>planar</i>
Dead, but in denial	<i>undead</i>

What is it notable for?

(add all that apply)

TAG

Amassing trinkets and treasure	<i>hoarder</i>
Avoiding fights, fleeing early	<i>cautious</i>
Intelligence	<i>cunning</i> or <i>devious</i>
Disturbing/terrible presence	<i>terrifying</i>
Sneaking, surprising, ambushing	<i>stealthy</i>
Using spells or magic	<i>magical</i>
Working well in groups	<i>organized</i>

If the creature possesses some other quality that can be easily described in one word, make up a tag.

If the Darstrom fight, they fight as a pair, so I give them the group tag. They're maybe 12 feet tall and quite massive, so I give them the large tag. They're obviously fae, and notable both for using magic and working well together. I write down their tags as: group, large, fae, magical, organized.

Dangers

4 Hit points

Determine the monster’s maximum HP by answering the following questions:

How does it hunt or fight? (pick 1) HP

In large groups (6 or more, <i>horde</i>)	3
In small groups (2-5, <i>group</i>)	6
By itself (<i>solitary</i>)	12

Just to be clear: each monster in a *horde* has 3 HP, and each monster in a *group* has 6 HP. This isn’t a shared pool of HP (unless you choose to abstract a group; see page **XX**).

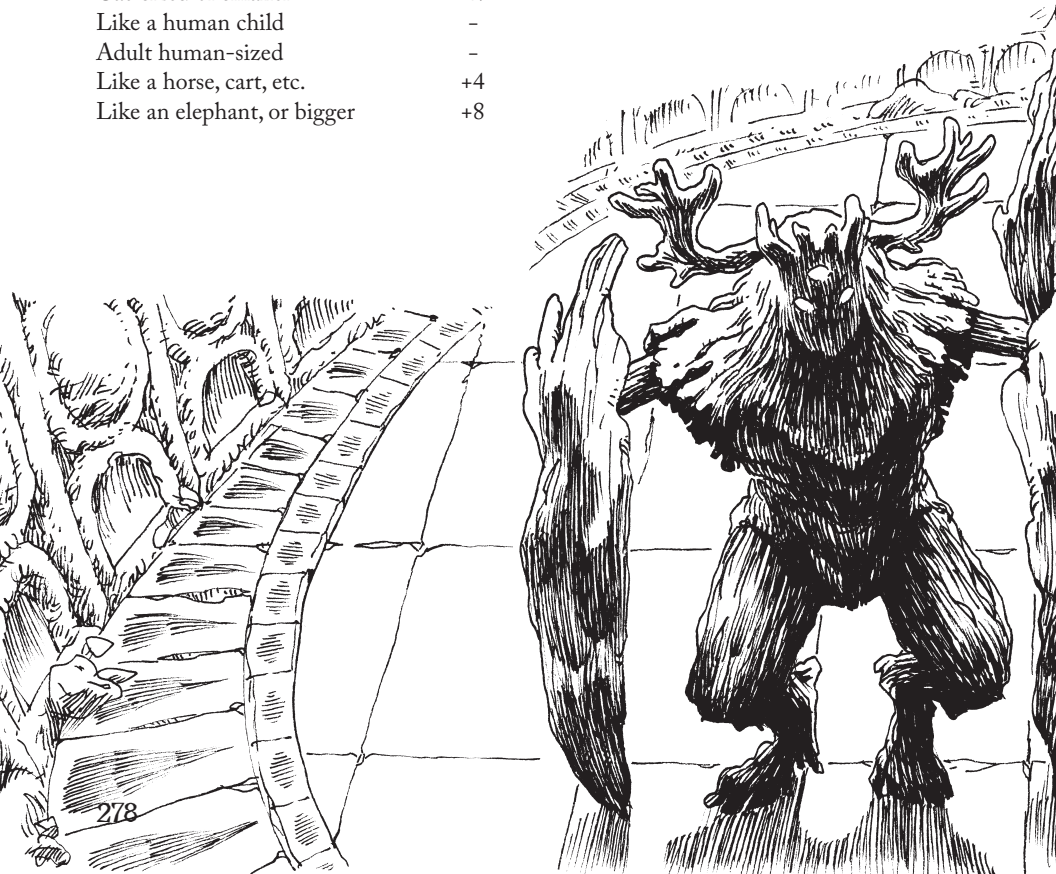
How big is it? (pick 1) HP

Cat-sized or smaller	-2
Like a human child	-
Adult human-sized	-
Like a horse, cart, etc.	+4
Like an elephant, or bigger	+8

What else applies? (pick all that do) HP

It’s particularly tough/durable	+4
It’s smiled upon by the fates	+2
It’s animated by more than biology	+4
It lacks vital organs	+3

The Darstrom fight as a pair, with the group tag, so they start with 6 HP each. They’re also large, giving them +4 HP. The fae have strange forms, but they are still living things with discernable anatomy: they bleed, have hearts, brains, joints, and so forth. But the Darstrom—with their woody flesh and massive frames—are particularly tough. I give them +4 HP, for a total of 14 HP each.



5 Armor

Answer the following:

What is it protected by? (pick 1) ARMOR

Naught but cloth and flesh	0
Leathers or thick hide	1
Mail, scale, or similar	2
Steel armor, boney plates, carapace	3
Potent magical wards or supernatural resilience	4

What else applies?

(pick all that do)

ARMOR

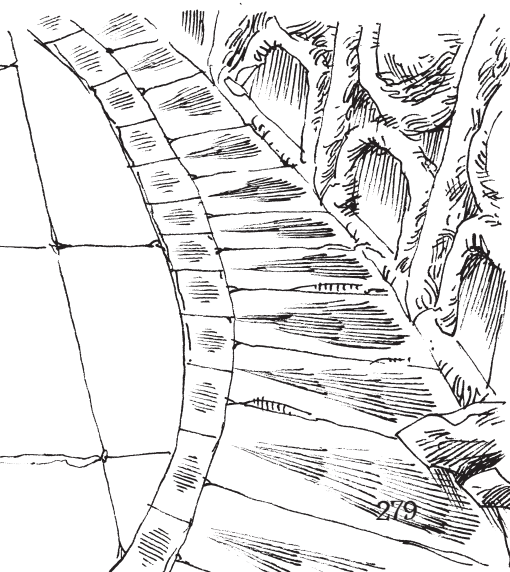
It's <i>tiny</i>	+1
It bears a shield or similar	+1
It's skilled in defense	+1
It lacks vital organs	+1

Make note (in parentheses, after the armor) of the source(s) of the Armor rating and any notable exceptions.

The Darstrom have the typical fae resilience to anything but iron, so I start by giving them Armor 4. Even against iron, they have wood-like flesh; I think that counts as "thick hide." They have organs and anatomy, so no bonus there, but I think that they're skilled in defense—they're guardians, after all. I write down:

Armor 5 (2 vs. iron; resistance or thick hide; skill)

Yikes. These things are tough.



Dangers

6 Damage

What is the monster's typical form of attack? Write it down, along with the monster's damage rating and appropriate tags. To determine them, answer the following:

How does it hunt or fight? (pick 1) DAMAGE

In large groups (6 or more, <i>horde</i>)	d6
In small groups (2-5, <i>group</i>)	d8
By itself (<i>solitary</i>)	d10

What is the nature of its armament? (pick 1) ADD

Useful up close and personal	<i>hand</i>
Work well at sword's reach	<i>close</i>
Can keep foes at bay	<i>reach</i>
Useful at range	<i>near</i> and/ <i>or far</i>
Can hurt many foes	<i>area</i>
Small and weak	-1 damage die size
Vicious and obvious	+2 damage
Can cut through leather or hide	1 piercing, <i>messy</i>
Can tear metal apart	3 piercing, <i>messy</i>
Can ignore armor entirely	ignores armor
Prone to breakage	<i>crude</i>

Range tags

These tags indicate the range at which the monster's attack is useful. PCs weapons also use these tags. Use them to inform what's possible, what's required, and what the likely outcomes are (see "Fictional positioning," page **XX**).

TAG	DESCRIPTION
<i>hand</i>	tight quarters; up close and personal
<i>close</i>	melee range, 1-2 steps away
<i>reach</i>	3-4 steps away.
<i>near</i>	up to 30 or so steps away
<i>far</i>	quite the distance; 100 steps, maybe more

How big is it? (pick 1) DAMAGE

Cat-sized or smaller	-2 damage, -range
Like a human child	-range
Adult human-sized	-
Like a horse, cart, etc.	+1 damage, +range
Like an elephant, or bigger	+3 damage, +range

"-range" means you should decrease its range tag(s) one step, while "+range" means you should add a range tag.

What else applies?

(pick all that do)

ADD

Its strength is unrelenting	+1 damage, <i>forceful</i>
It's skilled in offense	+advantage*
It strikes deftly	+1 piercing
Physical injury is not the worst danger it poses	-1 damage die size
It (or its species) is ancient	+1 damage die size
It abhors violence	+disadvantage*

* "+advantage" means you roll damage twice and use the higher result, while "+disadvantage" means you roll damage twice and use the lower result.

If the monster has multiple, distinct modes of attack (like big meaty fists and a 12-foot club, or a toothy maw and a tail that flings barbs), write each one down with its own damage rating and tags.



The Darstrom are loathe to fight, but when they do, they smash foes with their trunk-like forelimbs, or plant those limbs and kick out with their legs. I write down "Powerful blows" as their primary form of attack.

They fight as a pair (group tag), so they start with d8 damage. Their limbs are particularly long for their size, so I give them the close range (rather than the hand range). I consider giving them the +2 damage for armaments that are "vicious and obvious," but I don't think that's quite right.

They're large, giving them +1 damage and an extra range. I add reach instead of hand, because I think they'd better at keeping foes at bay than fighting ones inside their guard.

I'm picturing them as implacably strong, so I give them +2 damage and forceful. Their primary danger, though, comes from their abilities to extract promises and to mess with time and space. That reduces their die size from a d8 to a d6, but they're also quite ancient (from the time of the Green Lords), so I bump it back up to a d8. Because they loathe violence, they'll have disadvantage on any damage rolls.

I write their damage entry as:

Powerful blows: d8+3 damage w/disadvantage (close, reach, forceful).

Dangers

7 Special qualities

Consider writing a special quality for each of the following that the monster possesses.

- ⊙ An exceptional/limited sense (like “sees heat instead of light”)
- ⊙ A useful adaptation/defense (like “immune to fire”)
- ⊙ A strange form or composition (like “amorphous ooze” or “made of dust”)
- ⊙ A weakness or vulnerability (like “powerless in sunlight”)
- ⊙ An effect on its surroundings (like “flames dim and flicker in its presence”)
- ⊙ An important trait, not otherwise obvious (like “can talk” for a bird)

If it's a *construct*, be sure to write a special quality or two that reflect its construction or purpose. If it's *planar*, give it at least one special quality about how it is unnatural or doesn't belong.

Only write specialty qualities that you think will impact play, above and beyond their basic description and other stats. Don't bother with special qualities for things that are obvious or assumed. If you're writing up a giant demonic frog, you don't need to write down “amphibious” (it's a frog) but should probably write down “coated in toxic, caustic slime.”

The Darstrom have three glowing, empty eyes. That's weird and creepy, but won't really affect play. They have woody flesh, but I've already accounted for that in their HP and Armor. I've already noted their vulnerability to iron.

They have no mouths, but “speak” telepathically. I think they're entirely honest. And I think their presence messes with time and space—things change places without moving, moments take minutes, minutes pass in moments, that sort of thing. Those are all important traits that might influence play, so I write down

Special qualities: telepathic; can't lie or mislead; subtly warps time and space.

8 Instinct

What does the monster do that brings it into conflict with others, or leads it to harm others? Write this in the format “to [do something].”

Good instincts describe a general pattern of behavior rather than a specific action. “To gorge itself” is a good instinct; “to swallow prey whole” is too specific (that’s more like a move). With that said, try to write instincts that are distinctive. “To hunt” is an okay instinct; “to relentlessly pursue its prey” is better.

It’s possible that a monster might have multiple instincts, like a cave bear’s “to fill its belly; to protect its young.” Do this sparingly; its best for nuanced monsters with conflicting motivations, or for monsters who are strongly ruled by their base natures.

The Darstrom guard the entrance to their Green Lord master’s burial vault and constructed afterlife. They’ll challenge anyone who approaches, judging them, demanding an offering, and extracting a vow of peace and respect. Ultimately, this behavior all stems from a simple instinct: to protect its master.

9 Moves

Each monster should have a few GM moves. Write these moves so that they finish the sentence “the monster can/ will ____.” For example: “surround and harry prey” or “smash through obstacles” or “sound the alarm.”

If the monster... (choose all that apply)

- ... **is deceptive and sneaky**, write a move about its dirty tricks.
- ... **uses spells or magic**, write a move that describes its powers.
- ... **works well in groups**, write a move about how it calls on or coordinates with others.
- ... **is a spirit**, but it can manifest or possess a physical form, write a move that describes how it does so.
- ... **poses a primary danger other than physical injury**, write a move to reflect the true threat it poses.
- ... **actively defends itself**, write a move to describe that defense.
- ... **has a special form of attack**, write a move to describe it, along with any tags and—if appropriate—an alternative damage value.
- ... **has fewer than 3 moves**, or if something seems to be missing, write another move that describes what the monster is notable for doing.

Dangers

Most monsters have three moves; simple ones might only have two. Particularly important or dangerous foes can have four or maybe even five.

Don't write monster moves that just describe its basic attack. If you gave it "stone-tipped spear, d6 damage (*close, reach*)," then don't write a move "Stab foes with a spear." You already know it can do that! If you really want a move to describe how it fights, write something more interesting, like "Leap headlong into battle" or "Hem foes in with a thicket of spears."

Likewise, avoid writing moves that are just "do its instinct." Look for specific ways to express the instinct. If its instinct is, "To pursue prey," then how does it pursue its prey? Oh, it can "Scent prey from miles away?" or "Unerringly track a creature whose blood it's tasted?" Excellent.

Write moves that will help you use this monster at the table. A loosely-worded move (like "Bully and manipulate people" or "Cast a spell of fire and flame") gives you a lot of flexibility and permission, but it's only helpful if you can improvise that sort of action at the table. A more specific move (like "Threaten their family or reputation" or "Conjure barely-controlled spells of primordial fire") will give you much more direction at the table, and might be easier to use.

The Darstrom use spells and magic, work well together, and their primary danger isn't from the wounds they inflict. That gives me three moves to write. I go with:

- * Lock eyes and teleport them away
- * Act in tandem, without hesitation
- * Lay a wasting curse on anyone who breaks their promise of respect and peace

That last one is a little wordy and unclear, so I split it up like so:

- * Require an oath of good intentions
- * Lay a wasting curse on oath-breakers

10 Description

Write as much or as little of a description of your monster as you like. Remember, the audience here is you, using the monster during play. Write your description with that in mind.

Think about how you'll describe the monster to your players during play. How big is it, what does it look like, how does it move, etc. Use similes and comparisons to familiar objects ("it's like a huge elk-centaur, with big old antlers on a skull head, exposed ribs and an extra pair of creepy little T-rex arms"). Maybe sketch something out, or find pictures online to show your players.

Tip: include at least one impression on a sense other than sight, like the skittering sound it makes, the smell of ozone left in its wake, the cold sweat they feel in its presence. Keep it concise and evocative. Limit yourself to three such impressions at most.

Other things that you might include in the description:

- ⊙ How many there are
- ⊙ Where they are found
- ⊙ What they are likely to be doing when the PCs encounter them
- ⊙ Social structures and relationships
- ⊙ Backstory and history

Many monsters are also NPCs; if they'll be talking to the PCs, consider coming up with a memorable, distinctive way to portray them at the table. (See page [XX](#).)

I think a bit about how I'll describe the Darstrom and jot down these notes:

- * 12 ft tall, humanoid, skin like wood. Tree-trunk forearms, goat legs, antlers. No mouth; three glowing white eyes.
- * Move like gorillas, or on crutches... plant their big forearms and swing legs forward. Creaking wood sound.
- * Weird, dreamlike presence. "Wasn't it just over there?"
- * "Voice:" quiet, breathy. Repeat every few words, like an echo.

11 Optional elements

If the monster has nuanced motivations or behaviors, consider writing out tactics for the monster, as a series of “if-then” conditions and behaviors. This can help you **portray your characters with integrity**, and speed up play.

To write tactics, think about how and where the PCs are most likely to encounter the monster. Write an “if” or “when” statement for that, and what the monster will likely do as a response. What are the PCs likely to do next, and how would that affect the monster’s behavior? Write another if/then for that. Keep following the likely forks in the paths, writing ifs/thens until you’ve covered the likely results: the monster attacking, the monster fleeing, the monster agreeing to let them go, etc.

If you expect the players to Know Things about the monster, then maybe prepare “something interesting” (for a 7-9 result) and “something useful” (for a 10+) in advance. See Know Things (page **XX**) for guidance. Remember, though: these notes are for your benefit. Don’t bother prepping stuff you can improvise at the table, or things that are obviously implied by the monster’s stats. Prep lore to fill in gaps that aren’t otherwise apparent, or to pre-plan just how much information you’ll give on a 7-9 or a 10+.

Finally, consider writing one or more custom player-facing moves. If there’s something the monster might do to the PCs, or an effect it might have on them, and a custom player-facing move would help you resolve it in play, then write it up. Player-facing moves are particularly good for resolving nasty attacks or touchy, unpleasant effects. Mind control, instant “kill” powers (like petrification), and poison are all good candidates.

For details on writing custom player-facing moves, see page **XX**.

I imagine the players might Know Things about the Eiricainn, and what they'd consider to be a "worthy" offering. I think of something interesting and something useful, and add that to the write-up.

I'm also thinking that the Eiricainn's telepathy make them particularly difficult to deceive. I write a player-facing move to reflect this.

When I'm done, the Eiricainn's write-up looks like this.

THE DARSTROM, guardian fae
(group, large, fae, magical, organized)

HP 14; Armor 5 (2 vs. iron, resistance or hide, skill)

Powerful blows: d8+3 damage w/disadv.
(close, reach, forceful)

Special qualities: telepathic; can't lie or mislead; subtly warps local time & space

Instinct: to protect its master

- * Lock eyes, then teleport them away
- * Act in tandem, without hesitation
- * Require an oath of good intentions
- * Lay a wasting curse on oath-breakers

12 feet tall, humanoid, skin like wood.

Tree-trunk forearms, goat legs, antlers.
No mouth, three glowing white eyes.

Move like gorillas, or on crutches—plant their big forearms and swing legs forward. Creaking wood sound.

Weird, dreamlike presence. "Wasn't it just over there?"

"Voice:" quiet, breathy. Repeat every few words, like an echo.

Something interesting: fae often find value in memories, experiences, or seemingly worthless random items.

Something useful: these fae seem to be living in an isolated realm, cut off from the real world; vivid memories of things that are new to the world since the time of the Green Lords would probably be particularly well-received.

When you attempt to deceive the Darstrom (even if you're technically telling the truth), roll twis: on a 10+, you hide your intentions and they're none the wiser; on a 7-9, they're suspicious and they probe a bit—either come clean now or double-down and try to deceive them even more; on a 6-, they've seen right through you.



Running monsters and combat

Remember, “monster” is just a term for something that the PCs might end up fighting. It includes hostile (or potentially hostile) people as well as spirits and beasts and honest-to-goodness *monsters*.

Regardless of their nature, monsters have personalities—or at least patterns of behavior—that are more nuanced than just “kill the PCs.” Every monster has an instinct. Most have a sense of self-preservation. Many have wants, needs, fears, or weaknesses that the PCs can leverage—they’re *characters* as well as monsters.

Portray your characters with integrity.

Consider what this monster—with *this* instinct and *these* motives, facing *these* PCs who are acting in *this* way—would do. Then have it do that. Hint at the monster’s story and its inner life. Present monsters who might not actually want to fight, or who can be reasoned with, or scared away.

But also, **portray monsters as monsters.**

Try to capture the fear of facing down a hungry predator or a big angry beast. Play up the tension, desperation, and bloody consequences of a fight with another human being. Think about what it’d be like to encounter a hungry ghost, or an other-worldly fae, or a demon made of boundless hate and jealousy, and try to convey that to your players. Make your monsters scary.

Let things burn. Don’t protect your monsters, and don’t protect your NPCs, and don’t protect the PCs. If the fiction and the dice and your sense of what would happen all point toward injury or death, then go with it. Don’t fudge things in pursuit of some grand story. Play to find out what happens.



Introducing monsters

Whenever it’s time to make a GM move, you can **introduce a danger** and put a monster in the scene.

Don’t worry about your monsters being “fair fights” or “balanced encounters” or something that the PCs can even defeat. Worry about your monsters *making sense*.

Portray a rich and mysterious world, right? If it makes sense for the PCs to stumble across a pair of (extremely dangerous) thunder drakes, go for it. Then **play to find out what happens**.

Exactly how you introduce a monster will depend on the situation, the monster’s tags and qualities and moves, and the actions of the PCs. “Obvious” monsters encountered in a wide-open space will give the PCs plenty of opportunity to plan and react. *Stealthy* monsters in a dark, cluttered space while the PCs stumble around in torchlight? Not so much.



The PCs are up in Gordin's Delve trying to trade off some valuables they found in the Green Lord's tomb. Rhianna's off talking to a contact. Vahid, Caradoc, and Blodwen are at a pub. Caradoc and Blodwen get up to leave and Vahid, he sees a couple of unsavory types get up and follow.

*Now, if these guys are just a pair of local miners that Caradoc managed to tick off, then I'll **introduce a danger** and let the PCs see them coming. "About halfway back to your hostel, you realize that you're being followed. It's those guys from the pub and they look pissed. What do you do?" The PCs have all sorts of options—they might try to lose them, or set an ambush, or talk, or whatever.*

*But if these bad guys are stealthy cutthroats who regularly murder unwary travelers in alleys and loot their corpses, then I'll be much more aggressive about it. I'll start by **hinting at more than meets the eye**. "You find yourselves in a dark, empty little trash-strewn square, and everything's quiet.*

Too quiet. You feel like you're being watched. What do you do?"

*Let's say they Seek Insight, roll a 7-9, and ask, "What should I be on the lookout for?" I'd say, "You're pretty sure someone's following you, or maybe circling ahead. And these alleys are filled with good spots for an ambush. What do you do?" Whatever it is, they'll be on guard. My next move will probably be to **introduce a danger**, but softly and with a chance to react. "As you pass a dark side-alley, two thugs rush out towards you, what do you do?"*

*But suppose they Seek Insight and get a 6-, or just ignore my veiled threat and blunder on. In that case, I'll **introduce a danger** hard and painfully. "Caradoc, this guy comes out of a dark side-alley and snags your right arm, twists, and shoves you face-first into a wall. Take 1d8 damage. Blodwen, you see a second guy step forward, sneering, a glint of metal in his hand. What do you do?"*

Dangers

The flow of battle

Fighting foes is a big part of the game, but combat isn't a distinct mode of play. There's no moment where you say "roll for initiative" and different rules kick in. There's no orderly round-robin where everyone takes one action on their turn.

When a fight starts, you **run the game**: describe the situation, make a GM move, ask "what do you do?" Resolve their actions. Repeat. Fights in *Stonetop* are—like everything else in the game—a conversation.

Monsters don't Clash or Let Fly; you don't roll to see if their attacks succeed. Instead, you make a GM move. Usually, you **describe the attack but stop short of it connecting**. Ask the player(s) in the spotlight, "What do you do?" Whatever their response, it's likely to trigger a move. Resolve the move, and let the situation snowball from there.

*Caradoc just got slammed face-first into a building and a second cutthroat is advancing on Blodwen, knife in hand (I'm **announcing trouble**). "What do you do?" I ask.*

*Blodwen left her staff back at the hostel; she's basically unarmed. "I'll give ground and back away," she says, "looking for a stick or a rock or something to defend myself with." That's **Seeking Insight**, and on a 6— the guy's probably gonna shank her. But she gets an 8.*

*"Yeah, sure, there's a broken broom up against the alley wall, you could use it as a club. And a few loose bricks." I then **put her in a spot**. "But as you see them, the guy comes at you, knife stabbing low like this. What do you do?"*

Fights usually involve a lot of things happening at once. You need to **manage the spotlight and keep everyone involved**. When there's a pause in the action, address a different character (ideally one who hasn't talked in a bit). Describe the situation from their point of view, make a GM move, ask "What do you do?" Sometimes you'll move the spotlight after resolving a single PC action or move. Other times, you'll resolve a few moves that flow naturally together, and move the spotlight when they're done.

*Blodwen Sought Insight and spotted some junk she could use as a weapon, but I kept the spotlight on her and had the cutthroat attack. She says, "I'll twist out of the way, then dive for that broom!" We agree she's **Defying Danger** with **DEX** (with advantage, for acting on **Seek Insight**).*

She gets a 9, and I offer her a cost or a lesser success. "You can get the broom but you'll be cut for 1d8 damage, or you can dodge clear and not make it to the broom." She decides to get the broom, taking 5 damage in the process. "Okay, you've got it," I say, "but your shoulder is bleeding from that cut."

*It's been a while, so I move the spotlight to Caradoc. First, I recap his situation: "So this guy has your right arm twisted behind you and he's pushing your face into the cold, rough brick wall." Then I make a soft GM move (one of my monster moves, **fight dirty**): "He grabs your hair and pulls back, and you just know he's about to smash your face back into that wall, what do you do?"*

A character actually suffers a monster's attack when...

- ... you set up an attack with a soft move, and the PC ignores it;
- ... the results of a PC's move (like Clash) says that they do; or
- ... the PC rolls a 6- on pretty much any move, and you decide that they do.

Suffering a monster's attack doesn't (just) mean that they take damage. It means you use the monster to make an aggressive, hard move. You can, of course, **hurt them**. Or you can make any other hard GM move that makes sense. If your move involves the PC getting hurt, roughed up, or worn down, then deal damage as part of that move.

"So this guy's got my right arm twisted? But my left arm's free? When he pulls me back by my hair, I'll quick draw my new dagger like this and stab behind me." I wasn't expecting that, but it makes sense based on how we've described things. Clash it is!

*He rolls a 4, and I start thinking about **hurting him** and breaking his nose on the wall. But Caradoc invokes Impetuous Youth, bumping his result up to a 7-9 (at the cost of losing his knife). He stabs the thug and deals damage (3 of the thug's 6 HP) but also suffers the thug's attack. I decide to **turn his move back on him**. "He yells and lets go of your right arm. But then he grabs your left arm, the one with the knife, and like twists it up and over like this, kicking your legs out and smashing you down. Take 1d8 damage, and oh yeah, your knife goes flying from your hand."*

A player's actions are informed by their **fictional positioning**—where they are, what they're doing, where their enemies are and what they're doing, weapons, momentum, terrain, lighting, and everything else that we've established about this situation.

Fictional positioning affects whether a PC's actions trigger a move, and which move is triggered, and whether an action is even feasible. It also affects the range of possible results, both good and bad. A strong fictional position can mitigate the bad results of a roll, and a desperate fictional position can mean that a 6- is really, really bad.

Skillful players will look for ways to shape their fictional positioning, allowing them to trigger more advantageous moves, set themselves up for better results, or even skip needing to roll entirely.

Dangers

*I jump back to Blodwen, who just dove past her assailant and grabbed a broken broom to use as a weapon. She got cut, but now has some distance between her and her attacker. I describe the situation: "You grip the broom and he turns to face you, a little more respect in his eyes." Then I **offer an opportunity** for Blodwen to seize the initiative. "He crouches down like this, knife at the ready—you can tell he's waiting for his moment. What do you do?"*

"Just like old Seren taught me. I'll pretend to be scared and present an opening. When he attacks, I'll sidestep and smack his wrist, then swing up and smack his face."

*I could say "no, he doesn't buy your act" or maybe even **tell her the requirements** and say she'll have to Persuade to lure him in. But I think this guy is a big bully, not expecting much of a fight, and he gets suckered in. "Cool, roll to Clash!"*

*She gets a 7–9, so her maneuver mostly works but she suffers his attack. She rolls only a 1 for damage (vs. this guy's 6 HP), so I say that she smacks the knife out of his hand but doesn't get the follow-up swing at his face. Because he no longer has his knife, I make his attack softer than I would have and **put her in a spot**. "Before you can swing up, his left hand grabs the shaft. Then he grabs on with his right hand, and you find yourself struggling over this broken broom handle."*

*I jump back to Caradoc, who's in a spot of his own—on the ground, no knife, angry bad guy above him. "He's still got your left arm twisted out behind you, and he's like kneeling on your back." I **announce trouble**. "He keeps adding pressure. It feels like your arm is going break or something. What do you do?"*

"I'll, like, reach back with my right hand and grab his face, try to gouge an eye or tear his cheek or something."

*That's just not reasonable given the position this guy has him in. I clarify the situation, then **tell him the requirements and ask**.*

"You're gonna need to get free of his hold before you attack him. And if you want to force yourself free, that's going to be Defy Danger with STR. You do it?"

"Wait, wait. I think this counts as a threat to my loved ones, right? These guys are trying to kill Blodwen, not just me. Anger is a Gift?" It's a bit of a stretch, but sure. "Cool, I spend 1 Resolve to act suddenly and catch him off-guard. Do I still need to roll?"

"You're still in a really bad position here. But I tell you what—I think catching him off guard means you can twist free and attack him at the same time. So a Clash instead of Defy Danger. Cool?" He agrees, rolls a 10+, and manages to wrench free with a yell and punch the thug out.

You'll generally focus the spotlight on one or two specific characters at a time. Other players can interrupt and interject, within the bounds of what the fiction, the rules, and politeness allow. Don't be afraid to shut down (politely yet firmly) a player who keeps stealing the spotlight, or whose character is preoccupied, or who wants to do something implausible.

*Caradoc finishes off his foe and I jump back to Blodwen, who's struggling with the other cutthroat over the broken broom handle. I **show a downside** and tell her "He's a lot stronger than you, you can barely hold on. What do you do?"*

Before she says anything, Caradoc jumps in. "I spend my last Resolve and act suddenly. I come out of nowhere and bowl this guy over. Clash?"

I'm tempted to say "No, this is happening while you're fighting with your guy." But his move does let him spend Resolve to "act suddenly, catching them off-guard."

"Hub. Yeah, I guess. Roll it!"

As a fight goes on, avoid anything that feels like "trading blows" or just a grinding away at each other's HP. Use your GM moves and the results of PC moves to constantly shift the momentum of the fight and the fictional positioning. Even when one side rolls low damage (or no damage), look for a way to make the situation change.

Regularly ask yourself, "Would this monster keep fighting?" Use its instinct as a guide, as well as what you know about its personality and why it's fighting in the first place. *Cautious* foes in particular will look to escape violence as soon as a fight goes south.

Caradoc gets a 12 on his Clash and does indeed tackle the cutthroat. He rolls only 1 damage, but his maneuver still works. "You shove him up against the far wall and he grunts a little."

*I shift the focus back to Blodwen and **offer her an opportunity**. "Whew, you're free. You notice this guy's dagger at your feet. What do you do?"*

"I pick up the dagger and calmly walk up to them. Caradoc has him pinned?"

"Eh, they're still struggling, but mostly, yeah."

"I put his knife to his throat. 'Stop. Piss off right now and you live. Keep struggling and I'll bleed you like a spring lamb.'"

I'm thinking that's Persuade, but really, he's got no reason to resist. They've clearly won, and this guy's more of a knife-in-the-dark type than a fight-to-the-death type. "He stops struggling," I say, "and his eyes bug out at you, Blodwen. He nods a little. Caradoc, do you let him go?"

Dangers

Foes they can't hurt

Sometimes, the PCs can't feasibly attack their foe. The monster might have a special quality (like "made of stone") or tag (like *huge*) that makes them effectively invulnerable to the PC's weapons. It might have a move (like "swat arrows from the air") that counters attacks. Fictional positioning might make an attack extra dangerous or impossible (it's got a *reach* weapon and the PC has a *hand* weapon).

When you first present such a monster, convey how hard it'll be to hurt. "It's got this lashing, whip-like tail, at least 10 feet long." "It's like literally a moving tree, 30 feet tall and made of wood." "She moves with the calm confidence of a master fighter."

If the players say that they attack in a way that just wouldn't work, then they don't trigger Clash or Let Fly. Instead, **tell them the requirements** ("you'll have to get past that tail first") or **reveal an unwelcome truth** ("you chop into it full-strength, and it just, like, takes a chip out of it") or **put them in a spot** ("she side-steps like it's nothing and her own spear flashes at your throat") and ask, "What do you do?"

Make the PCs work for it. They might have to figure out a way to actually hurt this foe. They might need to Defy Danger to get close enough, or Aid each other to have any chance of overcoming its defenses. They might need to use the environment to their advantage. They might have to retreat or flee because they just can't hurt it. They might need to wait for their moment. They might need to do something drastic.

Reward creativity and effort. If they have an idea or a move that would work—even one you never expected—then run with it. **Be a fan of the player characters.** But also, **respect your prep** and the fiction. If your notes say that this monster is hurt only by bronze, and they don't have any bronze, don't let them steamroll you into agreeing that it's also vulnerable to, oh, silver.



They're exploring the ruins near Three-Coven Lake. The room gets suddenly colder and the lanterns flicker, and (after a 6- to Seek Insight) a long, hand-like shadow reaches out and grabs Vabid. He drops his lantern and starts shaking in a fit. I address the others: "What do you do?"

Caradoc doesn't hesitate. "I draw my knife and slash into that shadowy limb, trying to cut Vabid free. Clash?"

"No, don't roll." I reveal an unwelcome truth. "Your knife goes right through the shadow, like there's nothing even there, but your hand goes numb and there's frost on the blade. Rhianna, Blodwen, you see this happen, what do you do?" Blodwen looks at her possessions and says "Bendis root! I've got some from my herb garden." She drops her staff, sets down her lantern, and Has What She Needs to produce some.

"It'll take a few moments to get it out and light it. You still do that?" (tell the requirements and ask). Yup, she's doing it. "Rhianna, what are you doing?"

"This is like a ghost, right? So what hurts ghosts? Iron? Silver?"

That's Knowing Things, for sure, and she rolls a 10+. "Silver. In fact, you're pretty sure that's why Vabid got that silver dagger last summer."

"Oh. Oh! I'll step in and pull it off of him, then attack this thing."

"Cool, roll to Clash!"

Fighting spirits

Spirits are hard to fight because, by default, they lack a physical form. Most mundane attacks have no effect and pass right through them. And yet the most dangerous spirits can still attack physical creatures, even without manifesting!

Some spirits (like ghosts and specters) are vulnerable to certain materials. The PCs might also acquire items (like the Twisted Spear) or moves (like the Lightbearer's Purifying Flames) that can directly harm spirits. A spirit reduced to 0 HP this way is destroyed or at least dispersed for the time being.

Many spirits can manifest or possess a physical form. The PCs can hurt such a form, but reducing its HP to 0 simply destroys the form and/or forces the spirit back into its intangible state.

You might find it useful to track a spirit's "manifest" HP separately from its "true" HP. If the PCs attack a manifest spirit with something that could harm its true form, those attacks damage both sets of HP.

Dangers

Multiple combatants

When the PCs face multiple foes (and they often will), break up the action into multiple smaller engagements—the Ranger fights one crinwin, the Fox fights another, the Marshal and his crew deal with the rest of them. This isn't anything formal. It's just a natural way to manage the scene.

Unengaged foes—those that aren't pinned down in combat—are all sorts of potential trouble. Incorporate them into your moves whenever you have the chance. **Announce trouble** and have them move to flank the PCs. **Show a downside** of being outnumbered and have them block a PC's path.

Reveal an unwelcome truth and have one come out of nowhere and smack a PC when they roll a 6-. Bad guys don't just sit around waiting to be attacked.

When a PC or follower engages multiple foes, make more aggressive moves than when they face a single foe. If they ignore the threat posed by multiple foes, **tell them the consequences and ask**. If they carry on and ignore the threat, or roll a 6-, or otherwise suffer the enemy's attack, then make your move extra hard.

When *a PC or follower's attack could feasibly hurt multiple foes*—because of the *area* tag, because a *group* of followers is making or Aiding the attack, or just because the player describes it in a way that makes sense—then the player rolls to Clash or Let Fly just once, but they roll damage separately against each foe.

When multiple PCs and/or followers attack a foe at once, one of them rolls Clash or Let Fly and the others Aid. If a group of followers attacks a single foe (or a significantly smaller group), they effectively Aid themselves.

When multiple combatants deal damage to a single foe, roll one combatant's damage (usually the best one) and add +1 extra damage for each capable attacker after the first. Apply tags from all the attackers as they make sense. For example, if a PC fights two Hillfolk warriors (d8 damage, 1 piercing) riding horses (d6+2 damage, forceful) and suffers their attack, you'd probably roll damage from one horse and add +3; that's d6+5 damage (1 piercing, forceful). Ouch.

Clever tactics can make a huge difference when dealing with multiple combatants. Holding a chokepoint reduces the number of foes they have to fight at once. Focusing fire on a tough opponent can help drop it more quickly. Attacking a group's flank and dropping some of them before they can react? Golden.



Rhianna, Gareth, and Eira (two of her crew) find Caradoc barely holding a doorway against six crinwin. Some turn and hiss. Rhianna says “We draw hatchets and wade in!” Her crew are archers but not warriors, so she spends 1 of her crew’s Loyalty (see page XX) to get them follow her lead.

Caradoc’s got two crinwin occupied, so I tell Rhianna she’ll be dealing with the other four. “How are you doing this?”

“I’ll take point, chopping the first one and plowing past him to get at the next. Gareth’s on my left, Eira’s on my right, a step behind, each hacking at one of their own.”

“Sounds like Clash with Aid from your crew,” I say. “But they’re not providing advantage—they’re letting you fight multiple foes at once.” Rhianna rolls an 8. She and her crew deal their damage but suffer the enemy’s attack.

Rhianna rolls her 1d8 damage twice (once per crinwin she engaged), getting a 7 and a 2. Crinwin have 1 Armor and 3 HP so the

first one goes down and the second is up but injured. She also rolls her crew’s 1d6 damage against each of the other two crinwin, getting a 4 and a 3. Gareth drops his, Eira’s is badly wounded but still up.

They also suffered the crinwin’s attack. I don’t have a particular move in mind, but I know it’ll deal damage, so I start with that. “Rhianna, each of you takes 1d6 damage from the crinwin you’re fighting. Actually, you take 1d6+1, because you fought two of them.”

“Really? Didn’t I cut the first one down before it could hurt me?”

I could tell her that it got a lick in before it went down, but whatever. “Good point. 1d6 damage to each of you.” She takes 4 damage herself. Gareth takes 1 and Eira takes 5. They’re all still up, but Eira’s in trouble. I let that inform my move and I put her in a spot. “Okay, so Eira got tripped by hers and it’s on her chest, smashing her head against the wall. She looks out of it and, Rhianna, you’ve still got a crinwin in your face. Meanwhile, Caradoc...”



Abstracting groups

If the PCs have a group of followers, then you'll often want to abstract their actions in combat. Resolve the group's actions with as few individual moves as possible. For example, if the Marshal's crew of six opens fire on a horde of 20 crinwin, have the Marshal make a single Let Fly roll to see how it goes.

If the group deals damage to another group, or takes damage from another group, then you can roll damage once per side and abstract the results. A group deals damage and has HP and Armor as though it was one individual member of the group. For example, the marshal's crew of six would deal 1d6 damage, have 8 HP, and 1 Armor from their hide armor. The horde of crinwin would deal 1d6 damage, have 3 HP, and have 1 Armor from their agility and reflexes.

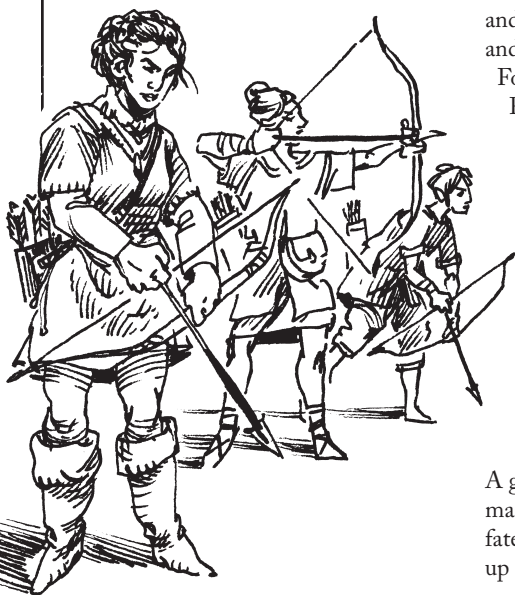
If one group outnumberes the other, they get a +1 bonus to damage and Armor for every multiplier past 1. For example, the 20 crinwin outnumber the crew of six by about 3:1, so they'd get a +2 bonus to damage and Armor.

Damage represents casualties. If one group loses half its HP, then about half that group's numbers are out the action. Adjust the bonuses to damage and Armor accordingly! So if the crew of six dealt 4 damage to the crinwin when they Let Fly, that'd do 1 damage after Armor and reduce the crinwin from 3 HP to 2 HP. One third of the crinwin (let's say seven of them) would be out of the action, reducing their advantage to only about 2:1. Their bonus to damage and Armor is now only +1.

Shift the spotlight between the group and individual PCs. Switch the scale and "zoom" of the action accordingly.

Foes that are engaged by individual PCs aren't really part of a group. So if one PC ran in and attacked two crinwin while another PC Defended and drew the attention of another three, the Marshal's crew of six would be left contending with only eight crinwin (20 to start, less 7 dead from Letting Fly, less 5 occupied by PCs). That's basically even numbers, so the crinwin have lost their bonus to Armor and damage.

A group reduced to 0 HP is routed, massacred, or otherwise defeated. The fate of individuals within each group is up to you.





Keeping fights interesting

Fights should be exciting, dynamic, and tense. The players should never feel like they're just "trading blows" or trying to deplete a foe's HP. Players shouldn't get bored waiting for "their turn," and the outcome should never be entirely certain.

Make soft GM moves all the damn time.

After every player move, describe the situation and make a soft move: say something that provokes action or raises the tension. Then ask someone, "What do you do?" Sometimes, your soft move will be **offering an opportunity** for a PC to act freely, or to follow up on a previous move's success. It's easy to do this accidentally, though, which results in the monsters seeming to just stand there and not do anything. Be intentional!

Make your moves—especially your monster attacks—colorful, descriptive, and specific. Don't just say, "It attacks you," say "It swoops down at you, talons out like this, coming right at your face! What do you do?"

Demand the same of the players. If they say "I stab it with my spear," then reply with "Okay, cool, what's that look like?" If the player seems uncertain, or hesitant to commit, then offer them choices. "Are you, like, running at it? Bracing yourself? Are you going for its gut or its wings or its face, or what?" If you can't visualize the action, ask for more detail.

Consider the momentum of the action and other elements of fictional positioning. Incorporate them into your descriptions and your GM moves. So if your soft move was "it swoops at your face, talons out" and their response was "I brace myself and drive my long spear into its gut!" and they get a 7-9 to Clash, then the results should take all that into account. "Yeah, you impale it, but its momentum yanks the spear out of your hands and they both tumble over here, next to the edge. Roll your damage!"

Dangers

Vary your GM moves, especially when a monster's attack lands. Don't always **hurt them** or **put them in a spot**. Lean on your monster moves to add variety. Sometimes, look at your list of GM moves and pick something you haven't done in a while, just to keep things fresh. No matter what move you choose: if it involves roughing up the PCs, or it could maybe take them out of the fight, then deal damage along with the move.

When a PC “whiffs” a damage roll, **respect the fiction of their attack** and the fact that they (probably) got a 7+ on whatever move allowed them to deal damage in the first place. The low damage roll means that it wasn't a telling blow, but it should still change the fiction. “Only 2 damage? Yikes, you don't pierce its hide. But it's still disoriented a bit, and struggling for breath—looks like you knocked the wind out of it.”

Keep in mind what other enemies are up to. The PC stabbed the monster that was swooping at him, but what are its friends doing? Use your next soft move to bring them into the action. “...looks like you knocked the wind out of it. Meanwhile, the next one is swooping down at you while you're unarmed, what do you do?”

Keep the spotlight moving. When one PC isn't actively engaged, make a soft move at the current PC, then move the spotlight to the idle PC and ask what they do about it. “...the next one is swooping down at you while you're unarmed. Rhianna, you see this happening, what do you do?”

Give less-combat oriented characters opportunities to shine. Encourage the Seeker to Know Things about the foe's vulnerabilities. Include spirits or beasts that the Blessed can interact with. Include victims to rescue, fragile treasures to protect, and puzzles to solve. Not always, and not every fight, but often enough to keep everyone engaged.

Incorporate the environment into your description and your moves: lighting, terrain, visibility, and the fog of war. They're on a massive staircase? Use a monster's attack to **put them in a spot** and bowl them half-over the edge. It's pitch black except for their sphere of torchlight? Have the monsters retreat and then **announce trouble**, “You can't see them, but you hear their calls as they circle for another attack, what do you do?”

Populate your battlefields with potential energy—heavy things to knock over, high places to fall off of, kindling to set aflame. Throw in some **active hazards**, too: raging fires, crumbling ceilings, sucking mire. Present these elements as opportunities to the PCs. Use them to answer “What here is useful or valuable to me?” Incorporate them into your GM moves, soft and hard.

Recap and summarize the situation regularly, especially as you move the spotlight around. “Okay, so: Vahid’s on the upper part of the stairs. His spear and the creature he wounded are over here, near the edge. Caradoc, you’re hanging off that same ledge. Blodwen, Rhianna, and Andras on the other side of the gap, with Blodwen holding the torch aloft and Rhianna and Andras scanning the skies. Caradoc, you feel your grip starting slip. What do you do all do?”

End fights earlier rather than later. If it’s clear that the PCs will win, have the bad guys flee or surrender. If things start to drag and someone rolls a 6-, use your hard move to drastically change the situation—a new monster shows up, a PC gets captured and dragged off, a follower sacrifices themselves to save the PC and finishes off the monster. If the PCs want to flee, let them Struggle as One to escape instead of playing out individual actions.

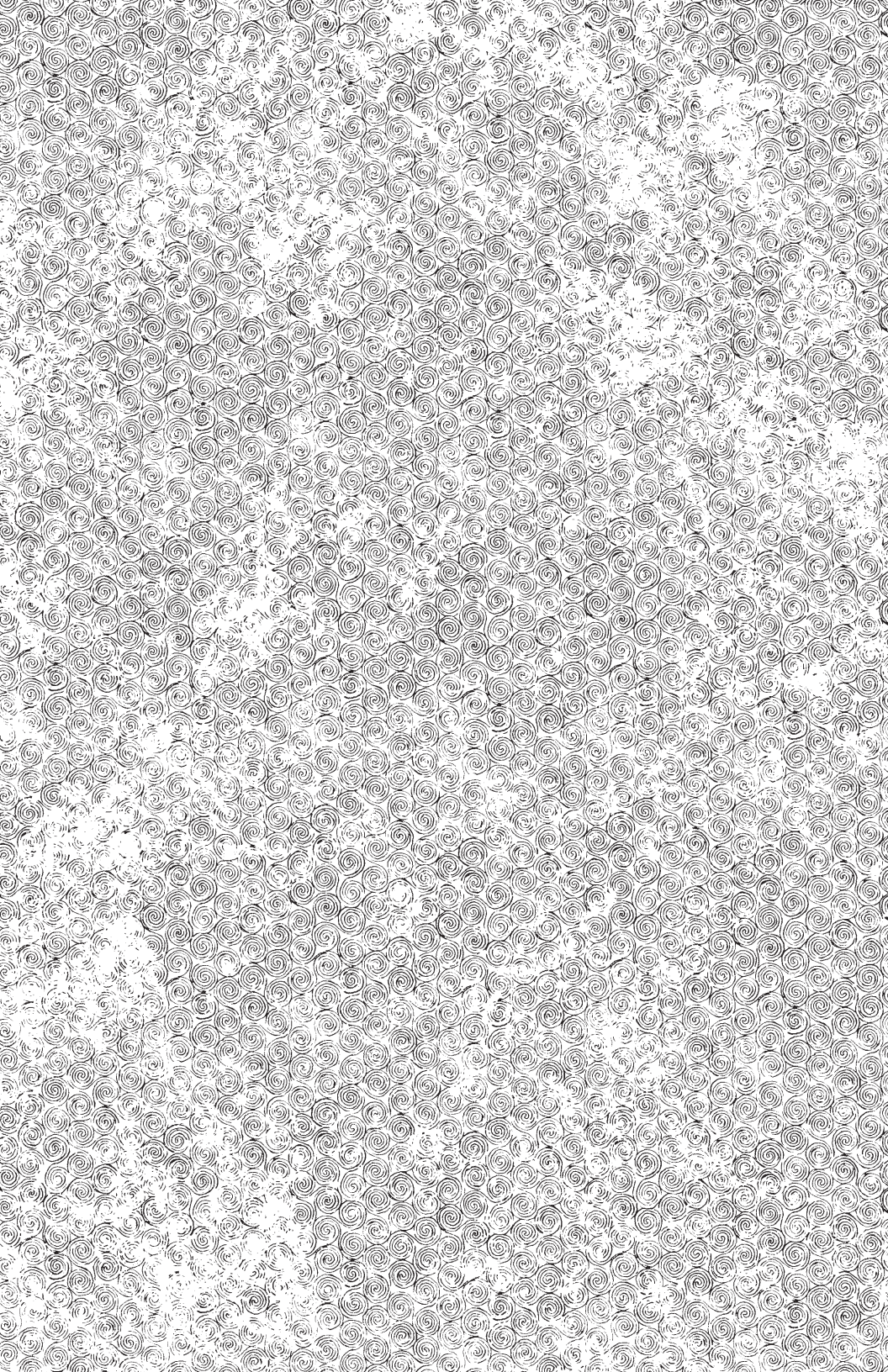
Finally, remember that this isn’t easy.

GMing is a practice, not something you master. You’ll likely start out forgetting to do all of this stuff, and that’s fine. Reflect a little bit after each session on what was fun and exciting about your fights, and what seemed to drag. Ask yourself what you could have done differently, and try to do that next time. Keep pushing yourself to improve!

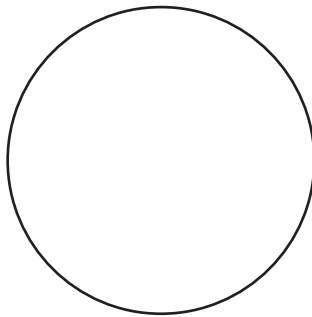
Maps, tokens, and minis

It’s often helpful to visually represent a battle, especially one with lots of combatants and distinct zones. This could be anything from a crude sketch of the battlefield to a full-fledged diorama with 3D minis and terrain. Visualizations like this are great for establishing the situation and making sure that everyone is on the same page.

Be careful, though, not to let the map dominate the game. Use the map to visualize and communicate, but keep the focus on the conversation. **Begin and end with the fiction**, not with meeples on the table or squiggles on the whiteboard! If someone says “I circle around to the north and then attack that guy up there,” pull them back into the fiction with something like, “As soon as you get to about here he snarls and charges you, ax raised like this—you still attack? Cool, what does that look like?”



NPCs & Followers



NPCs

NPCs in play

Creating NPCs

Followers

Follower moves

Followers in play

Creating followers

Updating followers

Losing followers

NPCs

NPCs are **non-player characters**, anyone who exists in the game's fiction who isn't one of the PCs. This includes people, of course, but also includes spirits of the wild, shades of the departed, and bound entities. It can even include beasts like dogs, horses, or plucky chickens. If it has a personality, and the PCs can communicate with it, it's an NPC.

Many NPCs are also **threats** (page XX) that cause ongoing trouble for the PCs or the village. NPCs can also be **monsters** (page XX) that the PCs can fight. This chapter, though, discusses them as people (or at least, as sapient beings) with whom the PCs interact.

If an NPC takes orders from a PC, deferring to them and generally doing what the PC says, then that NPC is a **follower**. Players can trigger moves like Clash or Seek Insight via their followers, and followers can hold Loyalty that makes them more likely to do what a PC wants. They're discussed in detail at the end of this chapter (page XX).

NPCs in play

Part of your job as the GM is to portray NPCs. What they do, what they say, how they feel—that's all up to you!

Practically, you portray NPCs as part of **the core loop** of play (page XX).

As you **establish the situation**, you say (or ask) what NPCs are there. You say (or ask) what they look like, how they're dressed, how they carry themselves. You say (or ask) what they're doing. You speak in their voices or summarize what they say.

When you make a GM move, you can use your NPCs to make it. You might **announce trouble** by having a follower sidle up to the Marshal and whisper, "we're being followed." You might **put them in a spot** by saying, "He's about to scream bloody murder, what do you do?" You might **show a downside** by saying, "looks like Mari got handsy with the serving staff again, and got a pitcher of ale over her head, again, she's about to lose her temper—again."

When you resolve player actions, you'll often need to account for how NPCs react or are affected. When the Fox tries to pass off a barrel of swill as fine whisky, you have to decide whether the merchant just falls for it, or would never believe it or, might believe it but only if the Fox Persuades them. When the Marshal has her crew Aid her in an attack, and she gets a 7-9, you have to decide which crew member(s) suffer the enemy's attack.

When PCs do something that doesn't trigger a move, you say what happens, and "what happens" will often involve how NPCs react. When the Would-Be Hero says, "I love you" to his sweetheart for the first time, there's no player move that tells you how she responds.

The point is: portraying NPCs—framing scenes with them, describing them, making moves with them, saying how they react to PC actions—is a big part of running the game.

Modes of portrayal

When you portray an NPC, you might actually **speak in their voice**, speaking in first-person (“I... just don’t know if I can keep... doing this”). Or, you might just **summarize what they say** and how they say it, speaking in third-person (“She tears up and says she can’t keep doing this—it’s awkward”).

Speaking in an NPC’s voice tends to be more immersive and engaging than just summarizing their words. It prompts players to respond in kind, speaking in the voice of their PCs. It allows you to show instead of tell. And it can be an awful lot of fun.

Summarizing an NPC’s words is often easier to do. It doesn’t require skill in acting. It’s easier to correct yourself. It often takes less time to summarize a conversation than to play it out. You can be more intentional about the info you share and the GM moves you make.

In practice, you’ll often **switch between modes**. You might start in third-person but deliver a key line in an NPC’s voice. You might start in first-person, then zoom out to summarize their tale. You might describe a conversation that involves multiple NPCs, but punctuate it with a few key lines in specific voices.

Try to **be mindful and intentional about how you use modes of portrayal**. Pick and choose based on the needs of the scene, the pacing of the session, and the preferences of your players.

Multiple NPCs at once

You’ll inevitably have some scenes where multiple NPCs are in conflict or at least have conflicting opinions. In such scenes, you need to balance **giving your NPCs life** with **being a fan of the PCs**.

Try to keep the conversation centered on the PCs. Have NPCs appeal to them and get them to take sides.

If that doesn’t make sense, then focus on conveying the gist of the conflict. Use third-person summaries more than first-person portrayal. Very few GMs can make an extended scene of “NPCs talking to each other” work.

That doesn’t mean you should avoid first-person portrayals when NPCs are in conflict. It just means that you should do so sparingly. Frame the conflict with a few lines of dialogue from each NPC, and then zoom out to summarize the conversation and their salient points.

When you *do* portray multiple NPCs in the same scene, be as clear as you can when each NPC is talking. Having distinct voices or mannerisms for each NPC can really help with this. Another trick is to shift your head/body from side to side as you switch characters, leaning left and looking right as NPC #1, and the

NPCs & Followers

Challenge yourself! If your instinct is to always summarize what NPCs say, try a bit of first-person portrayal. If you find that you always speak in-character, try summarizing conversations instead. GMing is a practice (page XX), and you only get better at things you try!

Dialogue scenes

Many scenes will be dialogue scenes, scenes where one or more PCs are talking to an NPC, and that's the extent of the action.

It's easy to fall into "just talking," where you all are inhabiting the PCs and NPCs and just play-acting, seeing how they respond to each other. It's fun, and it's a chance to **give your characters life** and to **let things breathe**. But be careful! It's also easy to let dialogue scenes drag on and meander without purpose.

Like all scenes, **good dialogue scenes have a purpose**. There's a reason that you (or your players) have initiated this conversation, between these characters. The PCs are trying to accomplish something; you're trying to convey something; there's a question that needs answering; there's a conflict to resolve—or escalate! Keep the reason for the scene in mind, even as you're portraying the NPC(s) and speaking in their voice(s).

Try to **stick to the core loop**! Establish the situation—the time and place, the NPCs involved, the tone and gist of the conversation—and then make a soft GM move. Have the NPC ask, "So, what can I do for you?" Or, have them say something provocative and give the player a chance to respond. Or, step out of character and say how the NPC is acting nervous, or how they look unwell, or how there's a strange new idol on their hearth that wasn't there before. Ask, "What do you do?" Go from there.

Remember to **be honest and generous with the truth and detail**. When you make a GM move (soft or hard) via an NPC's voice, step out of character and be explicit about the implications of what you just said. If you intend to portray an NPC being shifty and nervous, deliver their lines and then say, "He's being shifty and nervous." Don't assume that your players will properly interpret your portrayal.

Keep an eye out for players triggering moves during dialogues. If you (as an NPC) put up resistance and the PC persists, they just triggered Persuade. If you ask the PCs a pointed question and they straight-up lie, they're probably Defying Danger. If the PCs have special moves that kick in during a conversation (like Under Your Skin or Up With People), ask the player if they want to use them.

When the purpose of a scene has been resolved, or when the dialogue starts to fizzle out or swirl, **wrap up the scene**. Step out of character, transition to the next scene, move the spotlight, and/or shift into loose play.

Creating NPCs

Remember that one of your principles is to **give your characters life**.

You want your NPCs to be distinct and memorable, believable and compelling people instead of just names on a sheet. A world full of interesting NPCs is **a rich and mysterious world**.

You want your players to care about your NPCs and their fates—even if that means hating them or wanting them dead. When your players care about your NPCs, it's much easier to **punctuate the PCs' lives with adventure**.

Finally, you want your NPCs to act with integrity and their own internal logic. This makes them more believable and compelling, but it also means you can fall back on, "What would this NPC do?" and answer it honestly. It's a key part of **playing to find out what happens**.

So: how do you *do* that?

- 1) Give them a name
- 2) Conceptualize them
 - ⊙ Build on what's established
 - ⊙ Ask the PCs questions
 - ⊙ Pick a memorable trait
- 3) Give up to 3 impressions about them
- 4) Flesh out details as needed, such as:
 - ⊙ An instinct
 - ⊙ Their connections to others
 - ⊙ Their motivations
 - ⊙ How you'll embody them in play
 - ⊙ Game stats: tags, HP, armor, damage, and GM moves

You might also add details to treat them as a **follower** (page XX), **monster** (page XX), and/or **threat** (page XX).

You'll often improvise these details in play and flesh out the NPC between sessions. But if you expect an NPC to appear in an upcoming session, prep some or all of these details in advance. As always, though, **prep only as much as you find useful and valuable**.

1 Name

Give the NPC a name, or ask the players to do so. Choose from the appropriate name list or almanac entry, or use a name with a similar sound or origin.

- ⊙ **Stonetop names** are Welsh-inspired
- ⊙ **Marshedge names** are Irish-inspired
- ⊙ **Hillfolk names** are Breton- or French-inspired, but clipped and missing vowels
- ⊙ **Manmarcher names** are Germanic
- ⊙ **Barrier Pass names** are Tibetan- or Nepalese-inspired
- ⊙ **Southern names** draw from Greek, Hebrew, Persian, or Arabic.
- ⊙ **For other peoples** (like the Ustrina), consult the appropriate almanac entry.

Add the NPC's name to the steading playbook.

Prior to leaving on a trade mission to Gordin's Delve, Rhianna Musters the village to guard against crinwin. She gets a 10 and picks "1 or 2 individuals show real potential; ask the GM who and how." I don't have anyone in mind, so I look at the list of Stonetop names and say "Uh... let's say that Andras catches your eye to replace good old Garet. And, oh, Elios. He's some-one you can leave in charge while you're gone." I add both names as Notable Residents in the steading playbook.

2 Concept

Figure out who this person is.

What are the most obvious and important things about them? What are their pronouns? How old they are? Where are they from? If you had to describe them in just a few words, what would they be?

Build on what's established

Start with what you already know about this NPC and extrapolate. If the NPC is written up as a follower, monster, or threat, then their concept is already well-established and you just need to fill in some details. But if you're making up this NPC from scratch, you'll need to do more work.

No matter how sparse the details, you always know something about this NPC. How or why were they introduced? What can you infer about them based on that context? What have you already established about the world that can fill in the blanks? Go with the obvious answers or intentionally choose something that undermines a trope.

Hold your ideas lightly for now. As you ask questions and choose traits for this NPC, your initial concept for them might change. That's great! Stay loose!

I just introduced Elios as a good person to take charge of the defenses while the PCs head to Gordin's Delve. I figure Elios is an established farmer, maybe around Rhianna's age. I in-stinctively thought of him as a "he." I tell this to Rhianna. I'm now thinking of a good, well-liked family man, but we'll see what my players have to say.

Ask questions

Many NPCs will be people who the PCs would know, or least know of, so ask your players about them. They'll care more about NPCs that they help create! Keep in mind **"the line"** (page XX). Ask the characters questions that they'd be able to answer. The closer the PCs are to an NPC, the more questions you should ask.

For locals or people PCs know well:

- ☉ Are you related to them? How?
- ☉ What's their family situation? (Married? Kids? Parents? Siblings?)
- ☉ Who else are they close to? Who cares about them?
- ☉ What do you like/dislike about them?
- ☉ What are they respected for?
- ☉ What do others say behind their back?
- ☉ What's their most notable feature?
- ☉ How have they always treated you?
- ☉ What do they seem to like/dislike?

For outsiders, but ones the PCs know:

- ☉ When/how did you first meet them?
- ☉ When did you last see them?
- ☉ What do you know of their family?
- ☉ How would you describe them?
- ☉ Why do you (not) look forward to seeing them again?
- ☉ How have they changed since last you met?

For folks the PCs have heard of but don't actually know:

- ☉ What are they known for?
- ☉ What is said to be their most notable trait?
- ☉ Who do you know who's met them?
- ☉ How are they different than what you expected?

For specific NPCs, you can be much more provocative. Frame your questions so that they assert things that you want to be true, while still asking the player something meaningful. When you introduce a mercenary from the Heavy's blood-soaked past, maybe ask, "Why would you never want to cross swords with them?" or "What dastardly deed did you once see them do?"

If multiple PCs know the NPC, spread your questions around. Even better, ask questions that push the PCs towards conflicting opinions of the NPC. If you asked the Heavy what dastardly deed they saw this mercenary do, then maybe ask the Seeker how that same mercenary once saved their life.

Build on the answers your players give you. Clarify and ask follow-up questions, but otherwise treat their answers as if they've been true all along.

I ask Rhianna, "So what makes Elios a good choice to leave in charge?" She says that he helps her drill the militia. Folks have always looked to him when she's out in the Wood. "Why is that?" She says he spent time as a mercenary when he was younger, and has actual experience with this stuff. Interesting!

"Cool!" I say, then turn to Blodwen. "How are you related to him? And what's he like?" She says that he's her uncle (her mother's brother), a hard worker, gruff but always kind to her.

I then ask Vahid what he dislikes about Elios. And he's like "Ugh. He's the worst. Can't take a joke. No sense of humor at all."

Assign memorable traits

Give the NPC at least one specific, memorable trait and play that trait up. These traits become your touchstones for portraying them. Folks might not remember that the publican's daughter is named "Tegid," but they'll remember "the girl who runs everywhere."

Pick traits from the list of NPC Traits in the steading playbook, or make them up, or ask the players to do so. Write these traits down next to the NPC's name, along with their occupation or lot in life, plus any key relationships.

An NPC's traits might flow naturally from what's already established, but you can also pick a trait that contrasts with what you know or what you'd expect. Maybe the burly smith also knows all the gossip. Maybe the Fox's kind-hearted spouse harbors a hatred for the Hillfolk. Such contrasts make NPCs more compelling and memorable.

Based on what we know, I jot down:

ELIOS (he/him): farmer, humorless, ex-mercenary, Blodwen's uncle

I check the NPC Traits list, looking for an interesting contrast. My eye catches on "just got married." I think it's a bit fraught, and ask the PCs why. Vahid pops in with, "He married a younger woman, someone very talkative and bubbly. It's a weird match, but they seem happy enough. Well, she does. Elios is never happy."

I love it. I add "just married" to his write up, and make a note to figure out who his new wife is, too!

3 Impressions

At this point, you should have a solid concept for the NPC, enough that you can start portraying them.

If you're creating this NPC on the fly, frame a scene with them (if you haven't already) and **give up to 3 impressions about them**, their surroundings, or what it's like to be around them.

If you're prepping the NPC in advance, decide on these impressions now and write them down, to whatever level of detail you find helpful. Bring them up when you first put the NPC on screen.

Impression examples

Face: angular, broken nose, dimpled, freckles, hawk nose, leathery, missing teeth, paint, scar, scowl, soft, sunburnt, tattoo, warts, etc.

Eyes: big, bright, cool, cloudy, dark, deep, droopy, missing, pale, small, squinty, quick, watery, etc.

Hair: bald, curly, greasy, straight, thick, thin, etc.

Body: big, heavyset, little, lithe, meaty, missing __, round, short, stooped, tall, thick, thin, wiry, etc.

Presence: alert, brooding, cheery, elegant, fidgety, friendly, haughty, hunched, intense, serene, etc.

Scent: earthy, musky, floral, ripe, sour, smoky, etc.

Clothes: boots, charms, clean, [color], dirty, furs, ribbons, silk, torc, threadbare, unkempt, etc.

Voice: breathy, clipped, crass, gruff, high, hoarse, lilting, lisping, monotone, mumbly, nasally, quavery, rumbling, shrill, soft, stutter, etc.

Each impression should involve a different sense or aspect of the NPC (see the sidebar for examples). Keep impressions short, simple, and evocative. Give less detail than you think you need; let the players' imaginations fill in the rest.

Maybe ask the PCs to help describe the NPC, especially if it's someone they know well. Of the Would-be Hero's crush, maybe ask "What do you find most attractive about them?" When Brennan the Claw first appears on screen, maybe say "Rhianna, you've met him—what about his face makes it just so punchable?"

Most impressions should reflect an NPC's concept—they're a way to show rather than tell. But maybe give one impression that contrasts with the rest of the NPC: give the dastardly mercenary soft, sad eyes, or say that the well-dressed merchant reeks of body odor. Such contrasts give your NPCs depth and texture.

I'm ready to portray Elios, so I frame the scene. "Like you said, Rhianna, you double the watches and step up drills. A few days later, you find Elios, competently running a shield wall."

I give some impressions that play up his role. "He's got this deep, almost monotone voice that folks kind of lean in to hear, and a scar on his face that you assume he got in his days down south." Then, to make him a little more human, I add, "And as he watches folks practice, you realize that he's, like, fidgeting with a... locket? Probably a gift from his new wife."

4 Additional details

Fill in the rest of an NPC's details only as they become important and relevant to the story or to how you portray them.

If you're making the NPC up on the fly, you likely won't have time or the mental bandwidth to do these intentionally. It's common to just portray new NPCs naturally and instinctively, based on what you've already established. You can then go back after the session and take notes about how you portrayed them, and/or flesh out some of the missing details.

If you're prepping an NPC in advance, think about the following areas and make some decisions about them. But remember: prep only what's useful and valuable to *you*.

Embodiment

Consider one or more of these tricks to help embody the NPC. Tricks like these can help make the NPC distinctive, even if you're not a natural performer.

- ⊙ Pick **an actor or character from TV, film, or theater**. Tell the players to picture them as the NPC. Or, try to portray that character but don't tell the players you're doing so!
- ⊙ Pick **someone you know personally**. Impersonate them, but don't tell anyone.
- ⊙ Pick **a way of speaking or tweaking your voice, a catch phrase, a physical tic, or a behavior** for this NPC. Use it whenever you portray them.
- ⊙ **Find or create a picture of them**. Display it when portraying this NPC.

These tricks are relatively easy to use on the fly, while improvising a new NPC. If you do use one, make a note to yourself after the session about what trick you used, so that you can portray the NPC consistently in the future.

As the scene unfolds, and Rhianna starts telling Elios her plans and how she wants him to be in charge, I lean into that "deep, almost monotone voice" that I described him having. I lower my pitch and keep my tone flat. I realize that I'm doing the voice of Eeyore, the sorrowful donkey from Winnie-the-Pooh, and that seems right. I jot down "Eeyore voice" in my notes.

Instinct

Between sessions, consider writing an instinct for your NPC. Write them in this format: "to [do something]."

If the NPC is...

- ... **a monster** (page **XX**) or **threat** (page **XX**), their instinct should bring them into conflict with others.
- ... **a follower** (page **XX**), their instinct should cause trouble for the PC who leads them.
- ... **anyone else**, their instinct should reflect their basic outlook and how they approach the world.

Use an NPC's instinct to guide how they behave and react. If you're unsure what an NPC would do, look to their instinct. Have them do that.

*After the session, I think about Elios a bit and write this instinct for him:
To complain but get the job done.*

NPCs & Followers

Connections to others

When you have time—usually between sessions—think about how this NPC gets along with others. Ask yourself some or all of the following:

- ⊗ What do they think of the PCs?
- ⊗ Who are they related to? Friends with?
- ⊗ Who are they loyal to, and why?
- ⊗ Who do they dislike, and why?

Ask yourself follow-up questions. If you're unsure of an answer, leave it as something to wonder about for now.

Use the answers to portray the NPC, and to help resolve PC actions. The smith dislikes the Fox's spouse? The Fox might have to Persuade the smith to do an otherwise simple task. The smith is loyal to the midwife? Her support might get the smith to agree.

Don't flesh out an NPC's entire social network. Leave blanks, and fill in details as they become relevant to play.

My notes for Elios now look like this:

ELIOS (he/him): farmer, humorless, ex-mercenary, Blodwen's uncle. Newly married. Eeyore voice.
Instinct: to complain but get the job done.

After the session, I ask myself some of these questions and add these notes:

Respects Rhianna. Kind to Blodwen. Vahid is a dangerous weirdo. Loyal to his wife.

I need to flesh out his wife, but it can wait until I need her for a scene.

Motivations

If you want to really flesh out an NPC's internal life and motivations, ask yourself some or all of the following:

- ⊗ What do want from the PCs?
- ⊗ What do they fear?
- ⊗ What angers them?
- ⊗ What do they long for?
- ⊗ What do they think they deserve?
- ⊗ What do they aspire to do or be?

Unless you really enjoy this kind of prep, save these questions for NPCs whose inner lives and motivations really matter. In most cases, you can rely on an NPC's concept, traits, and instincts.

Elios's motivations seem straightforward to me. For now, humorlessness, his instinct ("to complain but get the job done") and his new marriage give me plenty to work with.

In the future, though, maybe folks start to doubt Rhianna's leadership and look to Elios instead. At that point, I might ask myself some of these questions. What does he want from the PCs? He wants Rhianna to get her crap together. What does he fear? Being responsible for the entire town's safety, but also his wife or infant son coming to harm. What angers him? The way Vahid and Caradoc keep bringing trouble down on the village, and how Rhianna turns a blind eye towards that.

Such answers would imply a looming confrontation between Elios and Rhianna, where he demanded that she do reign in Caradoc and Vahid or else step down from the role of marshal.

Game stats

If you think that an NPC...

- ... **might get into a fight with the PCs**, stat them up as a **monster** (page **XX**).
- ... **will cause ongoing trouble**, write them up as a **threat** (page **XX**).
- ... **will regularly act on a PC's orders**, stat them up as a **follower** (page **XX**).
- ... **needs HP, armor, and a damage die, but isn't a monster or follower**, then use the follower guidelines anyhow (page **XX**). Or just wing it.

An NPC might not need these stats when you first create or conceive of them, but that might change over time. A friendly NPC might start following the PC's lead and become a follower. Or they might become a source of ongoing trouble and become a threat. Or both. Both is good.

When I first introduce Elios, I don't expect him to get into a fight with the PCs, and he's not causing them any trouble. So there's no need to give him monster stats or write him up as a threat.

He respects Rhianna, and generally defers to her when it comes to the town's defenses, but I don't really see him as her follower.

As play progresses, though, and the town becomes frustrated with Rhianna's leadership, I might decide that Elios has become an ongoing problem and I'd write him up as a threat (a wildcard, probably, at least to start).

Followers

Followers are NPCs who generally take orders from a PC and follow their lead. They're usually people, but well-trained beasts, bound spirits, and even sentient artifacts can count as followers. PCs can gain followers mechanically (via their play-book, a move, or an arcanum), or naturally through the course of play.

Followers are, first and foremost, NPCs. You, the GM ultimately decides what they do and what they say, and what happens to them. What distinguishes them from other NPCs is that...

- ... they'll generally do as their PC says;
- ... they can accumulate Loyalty to their PC, which makes them easier to lead and manage; and
- ... when a PC has them do something, they can trigger player moves.

Followers also get a full set of stats, very similar to those of **monsters** (page **XX**). They have tags, HP, armor, a damage die, an instinct, and possibly GM moves.

Followers also have two additional stats: a **cost** and **Loyalty**.

A follower's cost describes what keeps them following a PC's lead. It's usually a few words, like "coin, payment, treasure" or "affection, respect" or "training." When a PC pays the follower's cost, the follower holds Loyalty.

Loyalty is a currency the followers can hold. The follower's player can spend that Loyalty to get the follower to ignore fear, behave themselves, or do something they'd rather not do. See the Strengthen Your Bond move (page **XX**) for details.

Here's an example follower:

RHIANNA'S CREW, the hunters

Group, archers, observant, stealthy, respected, woods-wise

HP 6; Armor 0

Damage: hatchet 1d6 (hand) or bow 1d6 (near, 0 low ammo, 0 out)

Instinct: to hew to tradition and superstition

Cost: merry-making, as a group (Loyalty 000)

Eira (lieutenant, cynical), Lowri (snores, sharp-eyed), Harri (skinny, old), Gareth (dead), two others.

As the Marshal, Rhianna starts with a crew and gets to define who they are. Her crew are the town's hunters. We generally treat them as a group, but Eira, Lowri, Harri, and poor departed Gareth have all been established as individuals.

After Gareth's death, Rhianna recruited:

ANDRAS, apprentice hunter

Archer, observant, eager, rookie

HP 6; Armor 0

Damage: hatchet 1d6 (hand) or bow 1d6 (near, 0 low ammo, 0 out)

Instinct: to try to impress Rhianna

Cost: recognition (Loyalty 000)

Young man, Padraig's son. Sweet on Blodwen. Tries real hard, asks lots of questions.

He caught her eye when she Mustered the village before a trip to Gordin's Delve. Over time, Andras became more and more competent, eventually merging with Rhianna's crew of hunters.

Here's another example:

FFLUR, a draft horse
 Large, powerful, keen-nosed, hardy
 HP 10; Armor 0
 Damage: hoofs 1d6+3 (hand, close, forceful)
 Instinct: to panic
 Cost: extensive care, grooming
 (Loyalty ○○○)

A chestnut mare, maybe 12 years old. Always hungry. More sensible than Celyn, but still a horse.

Fflur is one of the town's two horses, listed on the stading playbook as assets. The PCs Requisitioned her and a cart for their trip Gordin's Delve, but it was Blodwen's player who named her.

The horses are important to the town, and Blodwen can talk to animals, so the players and I were interested in Fflur as a character. We decided to treat her as a follower. Because Blodwen can speak to her and she took the most interest, we agreed to treat Fflur as Blodwen's follower, specifically.

And one more:

ANDALAU OF THE FLUTE, dancing wind spirit
 Spirit, tiny, stealthy, mischievous
 HP 8; Armor 0
 Damage: none
 Instinct: to play and frolic
 > Manifest as a fluttering gust of wind (harmed only by salt)
 > Deliver a whispery message
 > Flit things about (dust, leaves, etc.)
 > Annoy or spook someone
 Cost: entertainment (Loyalty ○○○)

When you play a tune to make the wind itself dance, the andalau manifests, holding 1 Loyalty. When you dismiss the spirit while it holds no Loyalty, the flute splits and falls apart; the andalau is set free.

Vahid discovered a cracked flute of yew wood—a **minor arcana** (page XX)—in the Green Lord's tomb. After a few weeks of practice and misadventure, he can now summon the andalau that's bound to the flute. It'll generally do what he says, but it's a fickle thing and he has to keep it happy or the flute will shatter and become worthless.

Follower moves

These moves become relevant when PCs interact with their followers.

ORDER FOLLOWERS

When you *direct your follower to do something that would trigger a player move*, and they do it, they trigger the move. If the move involves rolling, you roll for them. Instead of rolling +STAT, roll and...

- ... if they have at least one appropriate tag or move, add +1, or +2 if they're also *exceptional*;
- ... if they have no relevant tag or move, add +0; and
- ... if any of their tags would get in the way, roll with disadvantage.

When a follower is without orders or they act on their own initiative, the GM says what they do and decides how it goes.

Followers are NPCs—they don't usually trigger player-facing moves. You might **put them in a spot** and have a follower rush in to attack a foe they can't beat, but that's just you making a soft GM move. You tell the players that this happens and ask, "What do you do?" No one rolls Clash for the reckless follower!

That changes, though, when a follower acts at a PC's behest. The follower is acting as an extension of the PC's will, and so we look to the dice and player-facing moves to find out what happens.

If a PC tells a follower to do something that they don't want to do, the PC must Persuade or otherwise convince them to

do it—just like they would with any other NPC. **Loyalty** (page XX) makes this easier, but most followers won't charge a thunder drake without some convincing!

Assuming the follower *does* do what the PC says, and that action would trigger a player-facing move if a PC did it, then resolve the move normally. The player rolls on the follower's behalf, and makes any decisions they'd normally make if their PC triggered the move. If they roll a 6-, the player marks XP.

Followers don't have stats like STR or INT. If a move calls for rolling +STAT, the player looks at the follower's tags and moves. If any of them indicate that the follower is good at this, the player adds +1 (even if multiple tags or moves apply). Otherwise, they add +0.

If the follower is *exceptional*, AND they have another tag or move that applies, then the player rolls +2. But if no other tag or move applies, the player still rolls +0 for an *exceptional* follower.

If any of a follower's tags would actively hinder the move that they're making, the player rolls with disadvantage. A roll can get both a +1 (or +2) and disadvantage. If Vahid sends his *stealthy, mischievous* wind spirit to spy on someone, the *stealthy* tag helps (+1) but the *mischievous* tag means that it might get distracted and try to prank the target (imposing disadvantage).

Try to resolve follower actions with as few moves and rolls as possible. Zoom out and resolve complicated tasks with a single Defy Danger. If a follower takes the same action as a PC, treat that as the follower Aiding the PC rather than triggering a move of their own.

Rhianna just saw Caradoc get smashed by the hag, and she rushes to his side yelling, "Eira, Lowri—shoot!" They recover their wits, knock arrows, and Let Fly.

The crew have the archers tag (but not the exceptional tag), so Rhianna rolls +1 and gets a 7. The crew deals damage but Rhianna has to pick: put them in danger, roll damage with disadvantage, or reduce ammo. "I think they take a bunch of shots," she says, and marks (4) low ammo on her crew's gear. She then rolls 1d6+1 (her crew's damage, +1 because there are two of them shooting) and gets a 5.

"Nice!" I say. "It howls in pain and rears up, looking for what stung it, giving you time to reach Caradoc. Vahid, you've been watching this unfold, what do you do?"

Rhianna doesn't trust the hostler up in Gordin's Delve, so she tells Andras that he'll be sleeping in the cart and keeping an eye on it and the horse.

Andras is a follower and he'll be keeping watch off-screen, so I say, "I think you're having him Defy Danger, the danger being whatever the hostler gets up to. But don't roll it just yet." I have Rhianna roll the next day, after a few PC-focused scenes. Andras's observant tag applies, so she adds +1 but she gets a 5. "Caradoc, a bloody-nosed Andras finds you at the inn, and he's like, 'They stole Fflur! What do we do?'"

Eira is all but dead, the Shadowy Presence having sucked the life out of her. Blodwen asks "Do we know how to treat this? I'll consult with Gwendyl and Seren." We all agree that Blodwen's Ordering Followers, but it's unclear whether she's having them Know Things, or Knowing Things and having her followers Aid her. We decide on the latter, as it keeps the focus on the PC.

So, Blodwen rolls +INT, with advantage. She gets a 12 and I tell her "Eira's soul has been wounded. Gwendyl can fortify her body, but to actually heal her you'll need to go into a trance, contact her spirit, and try to restore it with your own. It'll be hell dangerous. What do you do?"

Blodwen and Seren have found Eira's near-fatal soul. Blodwen tries to Persuade Eira to let her help, but rolls a 4 and I put someone in a spot. "After some coaxing, she lets you approach. But as you do, Seren curses and shoots off. You see a pack of leering spirits emerging from the mists, and she's going to face them down!"

Blodwen asks if Seren is Defending or Clashing. "Neither," I say, "she's doing this on her own, not at your direction" Then I tell her the consequences. "She's holding them off for now, but she can't keep it up for long. You can help her, but Eira will run away. Or you can help Eira and hope you're quick enough to get Seren out of there. What do you do?"

Note that followers don't have access to the PC's playbook moves. The Marshal can order a follower to give a rousing speech, but they won't trigger We Happy Few. The Ranger might have Big Game Hunter, but their pet wolf doesn't deal +2 damage vs. large foes as a result.

NPCs & Followers

STRENGTHEN YOUR BOND

When you *pay your follower's cost*, and you haven't done so recently, they hold +1 Loyalty (max 3).

Spend your follower's Loyalty 1-for-1 to have them:

- ⊙ Overcome their fear to do as you say
- ⊙ Resist acting on their instinct/tags/traits
- ⊙ Do something they don't want to do (as long as it's not abhorrent or suicidal)

When a follower is without orders or they act on their own initiative, the GM says what they do and decides how it goes.

Each follower has a cost, like “genuine affection” or “coin, payment, treasure” or “training.” When a PC pays that cost—when they provide it directly or ensure that the follower receives it—then the follower gains Loyalty.

Paying a follower's cost should be a meaningful moment. Ideally, it should involve intentional action taken by the PC. Put the onus on the player to point out when they've paid their follower's cost, but of course—as with any move—anyone can point out this move has been triggered. If anyone disagrees, talk it out.

The PC and/or follower should have a significant scene “on camera” before they can Strengthen Their Bond again. If a PC pays a cost like “training” multiple times over a stretch of downtime or loose play, then the follower holds only +1 Loyalty.

When a follower's cost is paid, they hold +1 Loyalty, up to 3. If a follower holds 3 Loyalty, then Strengthen Your Bond doesn't trigger.

The follower holds the Loyalty but the PC they follow (or rather, that PC's player) chooses to spend it. As a rule, a follower is tied to one PC, and only that PC can pay its cost or spend its Loyalty. But if an NPC follows the party as a whole, then any PC can generate or spend that follower's Loyalty.

A PC will typically spend a follower's Loyalty after you make a GM move and show that the follower is afraid, or about to do something dumb, or doesn't want to do as they're told. The player can spend Loyalty to resolve that problem without having to trigger a move like Persuade or Defy Danger.

A player can proactively spend Loyalty, too, but if they do, consider whether it's really necessary. If the follower wasn't going to balk or do something dumb, tell the player that there's no need to spend the Loyalty after all.

It's easy to think of a follower's cost and Loyalty as transactional: I did this for you, now you owe me. That's true for some followers, but for most, Loyalty represents trust, respect, fondness, or even just habit.

Ask the player what it looks like when they spend a follower's Loyalty. Maybe the PC claps them on the shoulder and says something inspiring. Maybe they make eye contact and shake their head. Or maybe the follower just swallows hard and does what needs to be done. Work with the player to establish how this particular follower's Loyalty manifests.

The trip to Gordin's Delve takes four days, and the first day we establish that Blodwen is caring for Fflur. She's taking pains to groom her in the evening, brushing her down and keeping her company while she grazes. We agree that this pays Fflur cost ("extensive care, grooming") and Blodwen's player marks 1 Loyalty for Fflur.

The next day of travel passes without any significant scenes. Blodwen takes care of Fflur again when they make camp, and asks if she Strengthens Their Bond again. "No," I say, "you just did, right? Like, yeah, a day passed in-game but you've basically been caring for her this whole time, right?" So Fflur still holds just 1 Loyalty.

The next day, a frythanc (a huge bird of prey) swoops low over the party. The magic of the roads will keep them safe if they stay put, but I show a downside and play up Fflur's instinct ("to panic"). "Blodwen, Fflur bucks, rears, and knocks you back, tumbling onto the pavestones. She's still in the tackle, and if she keeps this up, she'll, like, break her leg. What do you do?"

"I get up and calmly approach, hands out like 'whoa, girl.'" She's trying to use her Into the Lion's Den move, which lets her calm beasts with a touch.

"I know the move says she won't harm you, but she's still kicking and rearing. I think there's still a danger that you flinch or show fear. You'll be Defying Danger with WIS. Or you could spend Fflur's Loyalty to keep her from acting on her instinct."

Blodwen uses the Loyalty and I ask what this looks like. "I'm like whispering to her, hands out, 'shhh girl..." and she calms down. Does that work?" I sure does!

Things are getting creepy out in the woods. The sun just dimmed. Trees are bleeding. Ominous shadows flit just out of sight. Vahid is painting a sanctifying mark on Caradoc's shield, but it'll take time.

"While they do that, Rhianna, your crew is kind of freaking out. What do you do?" She whistles and directs them to encircle the PCs, intending to have them Defend.

"Yeah, but I think they're Defying Danger first," I say, "the danger being their own fear. You know how superstitious they are!"

"Uh, no," says Rhianna. "I'll spend their 1 Loyalty to overcome their fear to do as I say. I don't think it looks like much, that whistle just snaps them out of it. So... I roll for Defend, then?" She sure does!

Gwendyl hasn't shown up for Vahid's Breaking-of-Fast party, and Blodwen goes to her house to find out why. Gwendyl claims she doesn't hold with "those deca-dent southern ways," but really, she's feel-ing neglected by her favorite pupil.

I expect Blodwen to press Gwendyl and trigger Persuade. Instead, Blodwen gives her a hug, apologizes for not being around, and says, "We don't need to go. Plenty to be done here." They spend a few hours cutting and bundling herbs. Then Blodwen asks if this pays Gwendyl's cost of "consideration, affection." I sure think it does.

"You know, there might be some baklava left at Vahid's," says Blodwen. "I spend that Loyalty to get her to do something she doesn't want to do." But, now that she's feeling better, I think Gwendyl would be fine going to the party, and I tell Blodwen to hold onto that Loyalty.

Followers in play

Followers are NPCs. They fall on your side of **the Line** (page **XX**), and **it's your responsibility—not the players'—to portray them**, to say what they do and what they say. A little blurring of the Line is natural, but if a player portrays a follower like they're a second PC, pause the game and reset expectations.

As with any NPC, **use followers as part of the core loop** (page **XX**). Include them when you establish the situation. Make GM moves (soft or hard) with them or against them. Decide how they react to the PCs' words and deeds—and that goes for all the PCs, not just the PC they follow!

With that said, **followers generally do what their PC tells them to do, and they often look to the PC for direction**. It's perfectly fine to ask, "And what do you have your crew do?" or to say something like, "He looks at you expectantly, do you tell him to do anything?"

The more established the follower is, the more you should **ask questions and build on the answers**. If the Marshal's crew is like family, lean on them when fleshing out the individual members or even when deciding what they'd do. "Rhianna, how do you think Hari would react here?"

Remember, though: **Order Followers triggers only when the PC directs a follower**. If you ask the player what they think their follower would do, and you agree that, yeah, they do that—that's not Ordering Followers, and the follower doesn't trigger any moves. You just decide what happens.

The burden of leadership

Followers can be useful, but they should also be sources of stress and conflict.

For starters, **followers get scared**. They might freeze up when surprised, or flee from a *terrifying* foe, or panic in the face of supernatural horror. Tell the player when this happens, and ask what they do. If the PC gives them an order, the player can spend 1 Loyalty to have the follower overcome their fear and do as they're told. Otherwise, ask yourself: **would the follower do this willingly if they weren't scared?**

If they would, then the PC is having them Defy Danger (the danger being that they freeze up, panic, or screw up).

If they wouldn't, then the follower needs to be convinced, via Persuade or some other move.

Even when they aren't scared, **followers won't always do as they're told**. They might resist orders if...

- ... they're angry, miserable, shocked, or otherwise overwhelmed;
- ... the order is unreasonable, foolish, degrading, distasteful, etc.; and/or
- ... the order goes against the follower's instinct, tags, cost, or other traits.

For example, a *warrior* follower will usually be willing to go into battle, but if the odds are overwhelming, or they haven't eaten for a couple days and they're wet and cold and have had enough of this crap, well, they're probably going to need some convincing!

When you decide that a follower doesn't want to do as they're told, then reveal that to the player! "He looks at you with tired eyes and doesn't even get up, what do you do?" Or, "You want me to what? That's... no, no way." Or, "You can tell he doesn't want to, you're going to have to convince him—what do you do?"

The player can then choose to spend the follower's Loyalty (if they hold any) to have them "do something they don't want to do." Or the PC can Persuade the follower, or use a different move to convince them. Or they could let it drop and do something else. Whatever they do, **follow the rules** and the dice and portray the follower with integrity, and **play to find out what happens**.

Play up a follower's instinct, tags, and traits as a source of trouble for the PCs.

Does the Ranger's wolf have an instinct of "to fill its belly?" Then have it chomp on the obvious bait, or refuse to leave a carcass uneaten. Is one of the Marshal's crew a gambler? Have her leave her post to join a game of dice, or have a creditor from Gordin's Delve show up to collect. The player can spend 1 Loyalty to have their follower "resist acting on their instinct/tags/traits," but if they don't, they need to convince them to stop or else deal with the consequences.

Emphasizing a follower's fear, foibles, and troublesome behaviors makes their Loyalty valuable! If a follower always just does what the PC says and never gets scared or acts up, then their player will see no reason to pay the follower's cost and Strengthen Their Bond.

*Vahid walks down the road from the logging camp and plays a spritely tune, calling up the andalau that's tied to his flute. Wind gusts and **flits**, and when Vahid stops playing I stage whisper, "More! More more more!"*

Vahid wants the spirit to find those ruins that Iwan visited, and lead him to them. Given the andalau's instinct ("to play and frolic") and mischievous tag, I don't think it wants to. I sigh and whisper, "Boooooorrrrrrring."

The Dancing Wind Spirit arcanum says that the andalau holds 1 Loyalty when it manifests; Vahid could just spend that. But the flute will break if the spirit is dismissed with no Loyalty. Vahid Persuades it instead. "Boring? Why, it'll be a fine game of hide and seek!" He rolls an 8.

"It's not convinced," I say, "but if you turn it into a game when it leads you to the ruins, it'd think that was fun. That'd even pay its cost." Vahid offers that and the spirit agrees. The next morning, the spirit returns. "Found it, found it, come, come, follow! Play!"

Vahid tells Rhianna that he can lead them to the ruins, and she has everyone get ready to go. But when her superstitious crew realizes that they're following a fickle spirit on a game of "hot and cold," they dig their heels in. Now Rhianna has to convince them to go along with this plan. If she had let the crew celebrate last night, it would have paid their cost and she could just spend their Loyalty. But she didn't, and they hold no Loyalty, so now she's going to need to Persuade them.

NPCs & Followers

Off-screen orders

When a player sends a follower off-screen to do something, resolve it with a single move (at most!). The PC won't be there to give follow-up direction when things snowball, so zoom out and pick a single move to represent the off-screen action. Resolve that one move. Let all the other things that could go right or wrong color the outcome.

If you really can't decide which move the follower is making, it's Defy Danger.

In general, have the player roll for their follower's off-screen move when the PCs could learn the outcome. If a PC leaves their follower in Gordin's Delve to spy on Mutra the Teeth, have the player roll to Seek Insight when the PC gets back to Gordin's Delve.

Sometimes, though, you want to know the results upfront, so that you can weave it into unfolding events. Say the Marshal has her crew sneak around to flank a foe. You might have the Marshal roll Defy Danger right away, and then reveal the results maybe a scene or two later. "A 7, huh? Okay, cool, cool." Then, after the PCs have snuck up on the bandit camp and are about to attack: "There's a commotion to the north, and one figure drags another out of the brush. Oh crap, they've got Hari! Everyone in camp is going to see what the fuss is about. What do you do?"

Followers in fights

Followers can have a big impact on fights. They can help even the odds or allow the PCs a overwhelm a single foe. But followers can also complicate the situation by panicking, getting into trouble, or acting rashly.

Keep followers in mind while you run fights. They might defer to the PCs or look to them for direction, but they'll rarely just stand there! When you establish the situation or make a GM move, think about what the followers have been up to while the spotlight was on the PCs. "You dispatch this crinwin, but see another one on top of Glaw. Hari's lining up a shot, but hesitating. That other crinwin is fleeing with your mess kit in its hands. What do you do?"

Remember, though, that followers only trigger player moves when directed to do so by their PC. If the PC ignores Hari and Glaw and chases after the fleeing crinwin, then it's your call whether or not Hari shoots. If he does shoot, you decide whether his shot lands, or misses, or hits Glaw instead. But if the PC shouts, "Hari, shoot, dammit!" while they rush after the fleeing crinwin—then they're Ordering Followers, and the player rolls to have Hari Let Fly.

Clear communication is hard during a fight! It's loud, you don't have much time (or breath!), and everyone is rather preoccupied with not getting killed. Don't let players give elaborate, detailed orders while a fight rages. A few words or hand signals is probably all they get!

If a PC's orders are vague, ask what they intend and how the follower would know that. Give them leeway if they've worked with the follower a long time. The Marshal's crew have drilled and fought side-by-side for years, so "Hari, behind you!" could convey "Hari, a foe is behind you, turn and attack it!" But with a new follower, a warning like that would only get them to dodge, at best!

For examples of followers in fights, see pages **XX, XX, XX, XX**, and **XX**.

When followers Defend

When a PC Orders Followers to Defend and gets a 7+, the *follower* holds Readiness but the player decides when and how they spend it.

When a player spends their follower's Readiness, consider whether the follower would actually do what the player wants. Would they really suffer this attack in place of their ward? Would they really draw all attention to themselves? If the answer feels like "no," then the player has to spend both 1 Readiness *and* 1 Loyalty—they're unlikely to have time to Persuade the follower!

When a PC Defends and a follower Aids them, that PC holds the Readiness but they can spend it to have the *follower* suffer the damage/effects of an attack, or to have the *follower* draw all attention from their ward to themselves. Ask the player what this looks like. If they're slyly using the follower as a meat shield, then the follower doesn't get much say in the matter (but they might have lots to say if they survive). If the player just expects the follower to take one for the team, well... that might require spending Loyalty, too.

Followers at 0 HP

When a follower is reduced to 0 HP, their fate is in your hands. If the source of damage was potentially lethal, then they're out of the action and you pick 1:

- ⊙ They're dead, immediately
- ⊙ They trigger Death's Door (even if they weren't directed to by their PC). Their PC's player rolls
- ⊙ They're dying, and will either die or trigger Death's Door soon if no one intervenes

Remember: it's not your job to protect your NPCs, and followers are NPCs! **Let things burn.**

If the source of the damage wasn't lethal, then the follower is out of the action until you say otherwise or they regain HP (because of magic, someone's move, or because someone tends to their wounds and they Recover).

Note: a Ranger's animal companion is an exception. They get a special move, *Loyal to the End*, that dictates what happens when they reach 0 HP. No one wants to see the dog die.

NPCs & Followers

Group followers

A follower with the *group* tag represents multiple individuals who share stats and often act as one. The Marshal's crew is the most obvious example. Other groups include the posse of villagers that the PCs recruit to deal with the crinwin, or the trio of wraiths bound to that tattered mantle (the one adorned with teeth).

Members of a group have the same tags, max HP, armor, damage, instinct, moves, and cost. They hold a common pool of Loyalty, but each have their own current HP. They typically Outfit with the same gear.

The PCs and Rhianna's crew have tracked the giant spiders through the fae paths to an ancient ziggurat in the Great Wood. They think Nia is inside. The crew each have 8 HP and are carrying a ◇ bow with bronze arrows, a ◇ bronze hatchet, ◇◇ thick hides, and two undefined ◇. They currently hold 1 Loyalty as a group.

The PC who leads a group follower will often **direct it to act as a whole**. If this leads to the group triggering a player move (per Order Followers), then the player rolls once, applying bonuses (and/or disadvantage) based on the tags shared by the group.

Rhianna says, "I signal my crew to sneak up and get in position. I want them covering us as we approach." She's Ordering Followers, having them Defy Danger (the danger is, they get noticed or even ambushed). She rolls for them, adding +1 for their stealthy tag, and gets a 7.

When a group follower makes a move and suffers some sort of consequence, you can have that consequence affect the group as a whole, or individual members of the group.

I opt for a lesser success. "Okay, they slip forward and get into position, all except for one of them. They're half-way to the ziggurat, and looking down, like they're stuck on something. Oh, crap, you realize it's a web! And if they keep tugging at it like that, the spiders are sure to notice."

When a member of the group first stands out, then flesh them out to whatever level of detail makes sense at the moment.

Give them a name, a memorable trait, and maybe an extra tag. Ask questions about them. Take notes, or have the player do so!

I ask Rhianna which of her crew got stuck, and she decides that it's one of the heretofore undefined members. She looks at her Crew insert, which has potential names, tags, and traits. "Um, Glaw. He's small, like short and scrawny, and I think he's too serious. A bit of short-man syndrome going on." She adds him to her insert.

"But he's a veteran hunter, right? So why do you think he's sorta freaking out right now?"

"Oh, I think he's often the butt of the crew's jokes, and he just knows they aren't gonna shut up about this. So he's not like, panicking. But he's on the verge of cussing up a storm."

When a PC directs an individual member of a group, they can trigger moves as if they were a follower themselves. The group's tags and moves apply, plus any unique tags or moves they have as an individual.

*Rhianna creeps forward and helps Glaw cut himself free, Defying Danger herself with a 10. I then **offer an opportunity** and point out a tall, thin tree that leans over the clearing. It'd be a tricky climb, but offer a clear view into the whole on the ziggurat's roof. "What do you do?"*

"It's tall and skinny, you say? Sounds like a good job for someone... small. I have Glaw climb it. 'No need for the others to know about the webs, eh? I'm, uh, glad you spotted this tree and called me over.' I wink." She's asking him to do something dangerous, but I think she approached it really well. I see no reason for him to resist.

"He looks up the skinny tree and nods, then drops his bow and extra gear and starts climbing. I think he's Defying Danger again; he risks falling, or making a lot of noise." We look at his tags and decide that either stealthy (from the group) or small (his personal tag) could apply, but that still means just a +1 bonus.

Rhianna rolls an 11, so Glaw scurries up the tree, peers in, and comes back down without problem. He's pale as a sheet, though. "Nia's in there, yeah. She's... she's standing stock-still, just staring at this... tapestry? Of like a huge spider. And the tapestry's kind of... rippling. It's... it's real creepy."

A group follower holds a common pool of Loyalty, which can be spent to affect either the entire group or individual members. The group's cost usually needs to be paid to the group as a whole, but if the player thinks it's valuable to spend Loyalty on one member of the group, they can!

*Glaw just saw something creepy and supernatural, and Rhianna's crew has an instinct of "to hew to tradition and superstition." So, I **show a downside** and tell Rhianna that Glaw is clearly shaken, on the verge of panic. It's just him, though. "What do you do?"*

"I put a hand on his shoulder. 'Nia's in there, and she's one of ours. I'm going in with the Blessed, and Vahid, and Caradoc. But I need you sharp out here.'" I ask whether she's Persuading him to stay cool or spending Loyalty to have him overcome fear. "I'll spend the Loyalty. I'm not risking a 6- here." The crew only held 1 Loyalty to start with, and now it's gone. But Glaw will hold steady!

NPCs & Followers

Each member of a group has their own HP, and they take damage and lose HP individually. If a multiple members of the group take damage at once, roll damage separately for each member and deduct it from their current HP.

The Mother-of-Spiders sends a wave of arachnids after the PCs as they flee the ziggurat with Nia. Rhianna's crew provides cover fire (Aiding the PCs as they Struggle as One), but that draws the attention of the swarm.

Rhianna yells for them to run for the waystone. We all agree that they're Defying Danger. Rhianna rolls +0 (none of their tags apply to an outright sprint) and, alas, gets a 2.

"That's not good," I say. "To start, they each take 1d8 damage." Rhianna rolls a 1, 4, 5, 5, 6, and 8, less 1 each for the crew's armor. "So, Glaw didn't take any damage? Well, he catches up to y'all, but you hear the others cry out. Vahid, you glance back and see Hari get tackled. What do you each do?"

Members of a group usually Outfit with the same gear, but the player can have individuals load up with different items if they're willing to do the extra bookkeeping.

Likewise, the PC can direct one crew member to Have What They Need and add an item to their inventory, without the rest of the crew each producing the same item. Keeping track of this is the player's responsibility, though!

In general, don't worry about small items or which member is carrying exactly how many uses of supplies. The players can track this level of detail if they really want to, but it's rarely worth the effort.

Spiders chasing down Rhianna's crew left to right, Hari in background at far left getting taken down by spiders

Vabid chases off the spiders by using his Fear of the Flame arcanum. Rhianna goes back and drags Hari out of there. Everyone makes it back to the waystone, where Thornthumb the spriggan has been waiting for them.

Before heading back through the fae paths, Blodwen tends to Hari, restoring his HP and stabilizing him, but he's still paralyzed. Rhianna has Lowri turn his 2 undefined ◇ into a roll-out sledge to carry Hari. She writes "◇◇ sledge (Lowri)" on her crew's inventory list.

She then has the rest of her crew each turn one undefined ◇ into ◇ supplies, for 20 uses total (five followers, 4 uses each). The four PCs then Recover, as do the four followers who are down HP, using bandages and whisky and food that the followers brought with them. The followers have 12 uses of supplies left.

Rhianna could decide that Glaw and Eira used up all their supplies and now each carry only five ◇ total, but it doesn't really matter at this point. If it becomes important later (like, if one of the crew members gets separated from the group), we can decide then who was carrying what.

When a group...

- ... **Clashes or Lets Fly** (or Aids a PC in doing so), the attack can hurt multiple foes. They roll the move once, and roll damage separately against each foe (see page XX). Consider abstracting the exchange (page XX).
- ... **Clashes with or Lets Fly at a single foe** (or Aids a PC in doing so), they roll the move once (likely with advantage) and one attacker's damage, +1 for each attacker after the first (see page XX).
- ... **Defends**, then the group holds a common pool of Readiness. The PC spends it on behalf of either the group as a whole or an individual member, whichever makes sense.
- ... **Recovers**, then each member who regains HP must consume 1 use of Supplies.
- ... **Seeks Insight**, then the PC can ask 3 questions or 1 question total, not 3 or 1 per member of the group.
- ... **Struggles as One** along with one or more PCs, roll once for the group. On a 6-, decide which member(s) of the group to put in a spot. On a 10+, ask the player who steps up to save someone, and how.
- ... **incurs a cost, suffers an attack, is put in danger, draws unwanted attention**, etc. you decide which member(s) are affected, and how.

Creating followers

PCs can gain followers...

- ... from a playbook, background, move, or special possession;
- ... by unlocking the mysteries of certain arcana; or
- ... organically through play.

When a game mechanic says that a PC gains a follower, it either provides the follower's stats or has the player choose stats from various prompts. Work with the player to flesh out the follower as you would any NPC. But you don't need to worry assigning them stats—the mechanic does that for you!

Followers who arise organically through play are a different story. They could come from anywhere and be just about anyone. An NPC might start following one the PCs around and doing what they say. A PC might Trade & Barter to acquire a hound, or Requisition one of the town's horses. Maybe they recruit some villagers to hunt crinwin, or save a merchant from bandits, or team up with a Hillfolk rider to kill some fell beast.

Before you write someone up as a follower, ask yourself:

- ☉ Will they follow a PC's lead, and generally take orders from that PC?
- ☉ Do you and your players care enough about this NPC to give them stats?
- ☉ Do you want to let the dice decide their fate when their PC sends them into danger (as opposed to deciding what happens yourself)?
- ☉ Are you okay with the extra book-keeping, mechanics, and spotlight time that a follower entails?

If you answer “no” to any of the above, then don't treat the NPC as a follower. This is not a hard-and-fast rubric, though. Your group might want to treat the village horses as followers, but other groups might not.

The answers might also change over time. The troublesome refugee kid might not be a follower to start, but after a season of living with the Heavy, he might become one! Likewise, an NPC might act as follower while they're on a particular expedition with the PCs, but cease to be one once they get home.

The PCs are preparing for their trip to Gordin's Delve. They've Mustered the village and identified two useful NPCs: Elios (who Rhianna will leave in charge of the defenses while they're gone) and Andras (a new recruit for her crew). They've also Requisitioned one of the village's horses and a cart.

Elios isn't coming with them, and I don't see him as just doing what Rhianna asks; he's not her follower. Andras, though, is an eager kid hoping to join her crew. I'll definitely treat him as a follower.

The village horse has follower stats provided, but at first we don't think of it as a follower. But as the PCs head out, it becomes clear that Blodwen and the horse (Fflur) are quite close. I'd like to disclaim some decision making when it comes to Fflur's fate, and I'm happy to juggle an extra follower, so a follower she becomes!

If an NPC is not a follower, then they don't trigger moves when they act on the PC's orders, and they don't have a cost or hold Loyalty. They might still have stats, and they still be might be monsters (page XX) or threats (page XX).

If you decide that an NPC is a follower, then figure out which PC they follow. Also, they need stats: tags, HP, armor, damage, instinct, cost, and maybe some GM moves.

Some followers will have stats already, from an almanac entry or a player handout. For example, the village horses have stats on the Stonetop stabling playbook, and you can find follower stats for a dog, mule, or horse in the Moves & Gear handout. If you decide to treat these as followers, then use these stats.

Note: you don't have to treat someone or something as a follower just because they have stats in an almanac entry or on a handout. If a PC has just acquired a hound but hasn't had a chance to train it, it's not a follower. If you just don't have the energy to treat the fen-walker guide as a follower, then don't!

If you decide that a monster becomes a follower, then they already have stats. To convert a monster into a follower:

- 1) Add any tags that you see fit, to reflect its nature or capabilities.
- 2) Choose (or make up) a cost, using the examples below for guidance.
- 3) Add a spot to track its Loyalty (max 3).

Otherwise, use its stats as-is.

If stats don't already exist for the follower, then you need to make them. To do so:

- 1) Create them as an NPC (if you haven't done so already; see page XX)
- 2) Give them tags.
- 3) Calculate hit points.
- 4) Calculate armor.
- 5) Calculate damage.
- 6) Write their instinct.
- 7) (Optional) Write their moves.
- 8) Write their cost.
- 9) Equip them.

See the following pages for details.

NPCs & Followers

1 Basics

If you haven't already done so, flesh this follower out as an NPC. Give them a name, develop their concept, and think about how you'll describe them. Add additional details if they seem important or valuable. See page XX for guidelines.

Andras is a young lad who's eager to become one of the village hunters.

First, we flesh him out as an NPC. I ask some questions of the PCs, and we learn that he's Padraig's son and just a few months younger than Caradoc. Caradoc's player also suggests that he fancies Blodwen, but hasn't worked up the courage to say anything about it. That's plenty to work with!

If the follower is truly outstanding, then give them the *exceptional* tag (see page XX). Such followers should be rare; save this tag for the best of the best.

If you're creating a *group* follower, then pick tags that apply to the entire group. As individual members stand out, consider giving each one a unique tag of their own.

I ask Rhianna to pick two of the crew's tags that Andras already has. "Hmm. I think he's already good with a bow, so archer. And I think he's observant. That's one of those traits that's hard to teach, y'know?"

Those are both useful traits, so I add eager (a mixed blessing) and rookie (definitely problematic).

2 Tags

Give each follower 2-4 tags, sometimes more. Tags are adjectives or nouns, and they should finish the sentence, "This follower is/is a ____."

Tags **serve as a guide when you portray the follower**, informing how they act or what they will/won't want to do; and **affect what a player rolls when they Order Followers** (page XX).

Avoid overly broad tags like *experienced*, *invincible*, *skilled*, *incompetent*, etc. You want tags that apply some of the time, not all of the time!

Give followers a mix of tags that are useful, problematic, and mixed blessings. More-competent followers should have more useful tags and fewer problematic ones, but even highly skilled followers can have some unpleasant quirks.

Tag examples

Useful tags: *agile, archer, athletic, beautiful, brave, cunning, fast, fierce, hardy, healer, intimidating, magical, observant, organized, patient, respected, self-sufficient, sharp-eyed, stealthy, tireless, tracker, warrior, ____-wise*

Problematic tags: *bigoted, drunk, greedy, gullible, lecherous, naïve, proud, rookie, reckless, short-fused, stubborn, frail*

Mixed blessing tags: *animal-lover, annoying, big, bully, callous, cautious, devious, eager, thieving, gossipy, honest, kind, little, shameless, terrifying*

3 Hit points

Determine the follower's maximum HP by answering the following questions:

How resilient are they? (pick 1)	HP
Weak/frail/soft	3
Able-bodied	6
Tough/strong/hard	9

What else applies? (pick all that do)	HP
They are <i>tiny</i>	-2
They are <i>large</i>	+4
The fates smile on them	+2

Andras strikes me as able-bodied—a healthy young man with the strength to pull a bow. He's not tiny nor large, and I've no reason to think the fates smile on him, so he has 6 HP.

*Andras, rookie hunter
standing ready
with bow, knife, old cloak*

4 Armor

Answer the following:

What protects them? (pick 1)	ARMOR
Naught but cloth and flesh	0
Leathers or thick hide	1
Mail, scale, or similar	2
Steel, boney plates, carapace	3
Potent magical wards or supernatural resilience	4

What else applies? (pick all that do)	ARMOR
They are <i>tiny</i>	+1
They bear a shield or similar	+1
They are skilled in defense	+1
They lack vital organs	+1

Andras is just a young man, with no special skills or protections. He has 0 armor unless Rhianna opts to Outfit him with thick hides or a shield.

5 Damage

Answer the following:

How dagerous are they? (pick 1)	DAMAGE
Not very	d4
Can defend themselves	d6
Veteran fighter or predator	d8

Range and other tags are based on their gear. For monstrous followers, use the damage guidelines for monsters (page XX).

Again, Andras is an able-bodied youth who's good with a bow. He's a rookie, but I think he can defend himself just fine. He does 1d6 damage.

NPCs & Followers

6 Instinct

What does the follower do naturally that causes trouble for the PC they follow? Write their instinct in this format: “to [do something].” Example instincts for followers include:

- ⊙ To take things too far
- ⊙ To question leadership and authority
- ⊙ To cling tightly to tradition
- ⊙ To act impulsively
- ⊙ To give in to temptation
- ⊙ To not take things seriously
- ⊙ To freeze up in the face of danger

I want to play up Andras's eagerness, which I like as a contrast to Caradoc, who's growing out of his "impetuous youth" shtick. I double-down on his eager tag and give him an instinct of "to try to impress Rhianna." That should be slightly exasperating and it's likely to push him into doing some dumb stuff, without making him a complete liability.

7 Moves (optional)

Write up to 3 GM moves. Write them so that they complete the sentence: “The follower can/will ____.” For example:

- ▶ Sniff out trouble on the wind
- ▶ Weave a minor glamour
- ▶ Wander off on their own

A follower's moves can reflect abilities not covered by a tag, or how they use a specific tag, and/or common behaviors (good or bad).

These moves are mostly for you and this step is completely optional, but the player sees them and they can affect what the player rolls when they **Order Followers** (page XX).

I consider giving Andras some GM moves like "moon over Blodwen" or "make a rookie mistake," but frankly I don't feel like I need them. This moves wouldn't affect any rolls that Rhianna makes on his behalf, and they aren't materially different from his tags or traits. So, no moves, at least for now.

8 Cost

A follower's cost describes what keeps them following a PC's lead. It's usually a few words, like "coin, payment, treasure" or "affection, respect" or "training."

Choose one from the list below, or make something up. When their cost is paid, they hold +1 Loyalty (max 3), per the Strengthen Your Bond move (page XX).

- ⊙ Coin, payment, treasure
- ⊙ Renown, public recognition
- ⊙ Affection, respect (from you)
- ⊙ Knowledge (about what?)
- ⊙ Wrongs righted, good deeds done
- ⊙ Amusement, entertainment
- ⊙ Progress (towards a particular goal)

Andras is a young man, eager and a rookie, with an instinct of "to try to impress Rhianna." I think that a word of praise from Rhianna, especially in public, would mean the world to this kid. And so I make that his cost: "Recognition."

9 Equipment

Either decide what gear the follower is carrying, or ask the player to Outfit them as if they were a PC.

For this first expedition up to Gordin's Delve, I decide that he'll show up with his bow, a hand-me-down cloak, some ◇ supplies, and an iron knife.

I write this down on an index card and hand it to Rhianna's player when he shows up for their departure:

ANDRAS, apprentice hunter
Archer, observant, eager, rookie
HP 6; Armor 0
Damage knife 1d6 (hand) or bow 1d6
(near, 0 low ammo, 0 out)
Instinct: to try to impress Rhianna
Cost: recognition (Loyalty 000)

Young man, Padraig's son. Sweet on Blodwen. Tries real hard, asks lots of questions.

◇ Bow & iron arrows (near)
 ◇ Old cloak (warm)
 ◇ Supplies (uses 0000)
 Iron knife (hand)

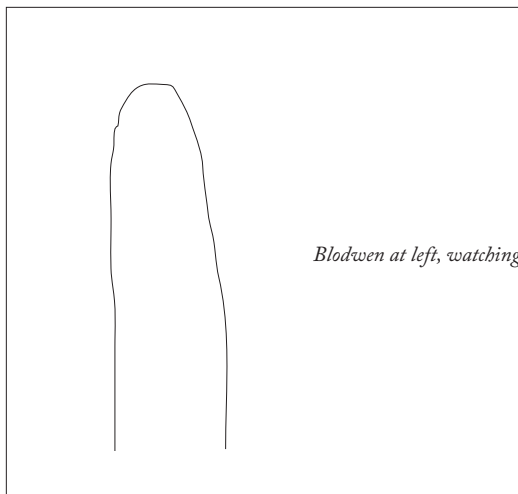
Caradoc gives him some grief about bringing a cloak when the weather is still so warm (for autumn). Rhianna, though, nods approvingly. "You know how to cook, kid?" He starts talking up the (small) handful of dishes he can make and she's like "Yeah, great, kid," and she adds a ◇ mess kit and two undefined ◇s to his gear.

Updating followers

Followers can change over time. They might change mechanically, like when the Marshal takes the “Veteran Crew” move. But often, they’ll change naturally over the course of play.

Between sessions, review any followers that the PCs have. For each one, if...

- ... **their instinct and/or cost no longer ring true**, then revise them.
- ... **any of their tags or moves no longer ring true**, then delete them or revise them, whichever makes more sense
- ... **they’ve shown a new aptitude, skill or behavior**, consider adding it as a tag or move.
- ... **they’ve become more resilient, or less so** (due to personal growth, injury, illness, etc.), then adjust their max HP accordingly.
- ... **they’ve become considerably more or less dangerous**, then adjust their damage die.
- ... **they’ve become a source of ongoing, active trouble** for one of the PCs or the village at large, write them up as a threat (page XX) in addition to or instead of being a follower.
- ... **it’s a group follower**, did anyone leave the group, or join it? Update the group’s roster to reflect this.
- ... **they no longer look to the PC for leadership, or would no longer take orders from them**, then they’re not a follower anymore (see next page).
- ... **they shift their loyalty from one PC to another** (or their current leader passes off responsibility for them to another PC), then tell the players, and maybe demonstrate it via a scene in the next session. Tell the players to update their notes accordingly.



Blodwen at left, watching

Losing followers

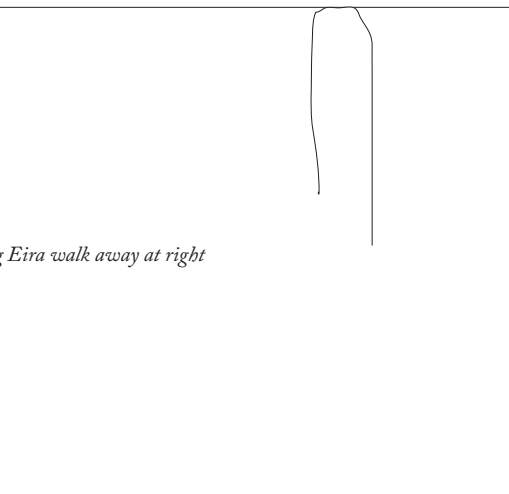
Followers might die, of course. But they might also stop being followers for a number of reasons.

The relationship between follower and PC might be temporary or situational.

When it no longer makes sense for them to take orders from the PC, they stop being a follower. They might return to follower status again, but for now, they have their own life to live!

Fflur became Blodwen’s follower on their trip to Gordin’s Delve, but after they return home, that doesn’t really make sense. The publican’s son takes care of the horses, Fflur and Celyn, and they’re often out in the fields.

Should the PCs bring Fflur on another expedition, we’ll likely treat her as Blodwen’s follower again. But around town, she’s just a horse that Blodwen is friendly with.



Eira walk away at right

A follower might change in a way that they no longer follower their PC. Maybe they lose their nerve, or move away, or have kids and settle down, or so forth. They might still be around as an NPC, but they're no longer a follower.

Eira survives her brush with death, and Blodwen heals her wounded soul, but she's never the same. It's like she aged 20 years in a week, and the next session, she tells Rhianna that she's done. It's an emotional scene, and we actually see Rhianna cry. When it's over, she erases Eira from her Crew insert and I add "retired" to her entry on the steading playbook.

Of course, it's not always amicable when a follower parts ways with their PC. If the breakup is messy, then the follower might very well become a **threat** (page **XX**). If the follower has been harboring growing resentment towards their PC, they might even betray them in sudden and dramatic fashion.

Vahid's put-upon wind spirit returns from spying on Thornthumb, full of news and playful energy—right as Vahid sits down for dinner with the widow Maire. He steps outside and pleads with the spirit to behave for now, and promises to play the flute out in the fields later, so that the spirit can dance and frolic.

The andalau is out of Loyalty, so Vahid rolls to Persuade. Alas, he rolls a 4. I ask Vahid how he thinks he screws this up, and he says that he loses his temper and starts shouting, trying to bully it into behaving.

I decide that the spirit has had enough. "It gets quiet and still. Then, hoo boy. The wind picks up, more and more, getting stronger. Gods, you didn't think it could be this strong. It howls, screams, and snatches at the flute." Vahid tries to hold on, but rolls a 3 to Defy Danger, and the flute gets smashed apart on the Stone.

The spirit was tethered to that flute, and now it's not. It's certainly no longer a follower. An untethered spirit would normally dissipate, but I think this one holds a grudge. It vanishes for now, but between sessions, I write it up as a threat (a supernatural entity, instinct: "to torment Vahid").